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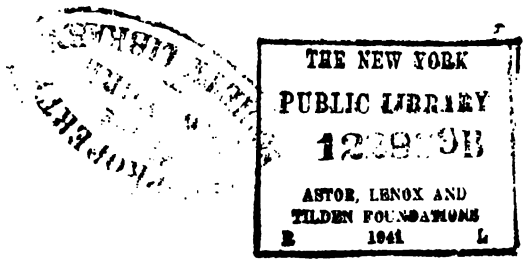

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F

IN LOVING MEMORY

OF

GEORGE TUCKER BISPHAM,

WHOSE KINDLY BUT JUST CRITICISM HAS IN THE PAST URGED ME ON TOWARDS THOSE DISTANT LAUREL-CROWNED PATHS FROM WHICH HE HAS PASSED TO HIS GREATER GLORY AND REWARD, I INSCRIBE THIS BOOK

AIKEN, S. C., February, 1907.

ILLUSTRATIONS

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"'Nobody Asked You, Sir, She Said.'" ..... *Frontispiece*

Suddenly Her Eyes Met Those of a Man in the Box Directly Opposite 16

Caruso was Singing His Last Song 112

'But who from thy self-chain shall set thee free?
What heart shall touch thy heart?'

Christina Georgina Rossetti.

The Master Influence

I

IT was the *première* of Mascagni's "L'Amico Fritz," and the scene was the auditorium of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

"Well, dear, have you ever seen a more inspiring scene?" asked Mrs. Mainwaring enthusiastically, turning towards her daughter.

"It is splendid mother; still I thought that people always arrayed themselves in purple and fine linen on the first night of a new opera, so it is hardly to be wondered at."

"But it is an occasion for you, too—your first appearance in public, and you are seeing the whole thing at its best. I wish you had more animation, though," she continued musingly. "You are like a faultless statue, which needs only a soul to make it human."

Unaware that her mother was annoyed, Helen adjusted her opera glasses and glanced calmly at the audience.

"Who is that woman in blue next to Mrs. Burneigh?" she asked. "In the fourth box from the stage, downstairs."

"In blue? I haven't the faintest idea," Mrs. Mainwaring replied, with a futile attempt at dignity. "Some stranger, I suppose."

"It must be," laughed Helen, "for you are always saying you know every one worth knowing in New York. I often wonder what you mean by that."

"I do not know who it is," repeated her mother, with a touch of hauteur.

"Well, it is not a matter of much importance," remarked Helen indolently. "Only, I like that especial shade of blue she 's wearing and I could not help wondering who it was. I don't suppose it will interfere with my beauty sleep, however. By the way, you never told me who are coming to-night."

"Who are coming to-night? Why, Ned Findlay, who was a great friend of your dear father's, young Taylor, Rosamond Barstow and Maud Teniel."

"I like her awfully, but I don't know Miss Barstow, do I?"

"I think not, my dear, but you will before long, as she goes everywhere." Mrs. Mainwaring's tone showed annoyance.

"She is coming here to-night, I think you said, and so I shall see her then." Helen's tone was slightly acrid. Really her mother could be just a trifle tiresome at times.

"What sort of a man is Ned Findlay?" she asked, after a brief pause.

"His friends call him a man of a certain age, but I should describe him as settled."

"Heavens!" cried Helen, figuratively throwing up her hands in horror. "I hope he is not the kind of man I fear he is. Don't tell me he will say, 'I remember you when you were knee-high to a grass-hopper,' or 'Do you remember the time I used to dandle you on my knee?' I hate such people!"

Mrs. Mainwaring, idly watching the musicians as they filed in slowly to their places, paused before she replied.

"My dear," she said at last, "Mr. Findlay is a gentleman. I need say no more."

"Dear mother, you are always so correct. I wonder sometimes how you reconcile the modern standard of living with the old days. You live in the present and think in the past. But perhaps that is the only way, after all. What is Mr. Taylor like? Younger than the other, I hope."

The entrance of the leader interrupted Mrs. Mainwaring's reply, and Helen leant forward, as the opening notes of the overture were heard. A compelling hush held even the more frivolous enthralled. The young girl was completely carried away, and for the moment the whole picture had no existence for her. When the door opened and Rosamond Barstow with her attendant cavalier came in, Helen seemed unaware of their existence.

"Helen—Helen, darling—here are Miss Barstow and Mr. Taylor."

"How do you do?" said Helen, rising and shaking hands with the new arrivals in turn. "I hope you will not think me horribly *distraite,* but I am literally crazy about music. When I am listening to it, I don't know at all what is going on about me."

"It must be delightful to care so much for anything," remarked Taylor, seating himself by the girl's side. "I can see that you love it, if you are able to talk like that about it. Look, Rose, there is a light in her eyes like the fire in those jolly old priestesses' we used to read about in the Greek plays."

"I don't remember ever having read any Greek plays, but I can imagine what you mean," answered Rose. "Mrs. Mainwaring, I thought Mr. Findlay was coming to-night."

"Later on, I believe," answered Mrs. Mainwaring. "He had an annual meeting of his club to attend, and he told me he might be a little late."

"Do you care for music as much as your daughter does?" inquired Philip Taylor.

"Yes, music has great charm for me, but Helen really loves it."

"Don't say love!" exclaimed Helen, with a touch of pathos in her voice, "That is too exaggerated a word. I don't understand loving—such things as music. I cannot conceive how—well, one likes a great deal or one dislikes equally strongly," she ended lamely.

A tall, distinguished-looking man, who had just entered, heard only the last words of the sentence. He greeted his hostess, then turned to the young girl.

"I understand what you mean—but I beg your pardon, perhaps your mother had better present us in form, or shall we just shake hands? I am Edwin Findlay."

"My mother has told me a great deal about you."

"I hope she gave me a good name," he answered gravely, but his eyes were twinkling as he spoke.

Helen smiled politely.

"You are different from what I thought you would be."

"Was the anticipation worse than the reality?" he inquired laughingly.

"I believe so. I beg your pardon, I did n't mean that. Listen to that heavenly duet, does n't it drive everything else out of one's head?"

And Helen looked dreamily toward the stage.

It was during the first entr'acte that she suddenly remembered Maud had not come, and she leaned forward and asked her mother the reason.

"I cannot imagine, dear. Something unexpected must have happened to prevent her coming. The position of matron of a hospital is no sinecure, my dear Ned, especially of such a successful one as the Carrington Home," she went on, turning to Findlay. "Maud is thought a great deal of there. I fear I am boring you, however, so——"

"On the contrary, though I am afraid your daughter——" He paused, then seeing that Helen had turned to the other occupants of the box, he continued to address her mother, and the conversation, involving hospitals and kindred subjects, proceeded until the rising of the curtain on the second act put an end to it. Just as the first bell sounded, a knock at the door was heard, followed by the entrance of an usher with a note for Mrs. Mainwaring. Having read it, she handed it to Helen.

"How unfortunate that Maud should not have her holiday!" exclaimed Helen. "It is from Miss Teniel," she added in explanation. "An operation prevents her from coming. I think I shall drop in and see her to-morrow."

"Are you interested in work of that kind?" asked Philip. "Women have so many fads nowadays. You would make an awfully jolly nurse," he added softly, so that only Helen might hear.

"I believe I should make a good nurse, as I am cool and not sensitive. Indeed, I might become very much interested in such work."

"I don't mean that. But how jolly it would be to be nursed by you!"

"Is n't the prima donna in wonderful voice to-night?" asked Helen, suddenly turning to Miss Barstow. "She

suits the part, and the part suits her. Don't you think so, Mr. Taylor?" she inquired somewhat stiffly.

Philip flushed, but gave a conventional answer, then fell into conversation with Miss Barstow.

Helen paid no further attention to them, being swept along by the waves of sound until the end of the act, when she turned enthusiastically to Findlay.

"Isn't it glorious?" she murmured. "Tell me you think so, too?"

"I wish I could," he replied gravely. "Now you," he continued, "are transformed by music. You almost glow with its fire, although I should say that under ordinary circumstances you were not easily moved. Is that going too far on such short acquaintance?"

"Not at all—quite the contrary," she said hastily. "I have very strong likes and dislikes. But I am afraid you will think me a very decided character, so I had much better say no more."

"My dear young lady," he interposed gently, "I am never tired of reading the characters of those who interest me, and——"

"I don't mean to be abrupt, and I don't want to be considered rude, but really I hate talking about myself."

Ned Findlay was somewhat taken aback, but he said nothing in reply. He decided to leave her to herself, and for a time he did not even venture to look at the beautiful image sitting beside him. Then he glanced furtively at her. She was listening intently to the music. He heard the murmur of voices in the back of the box, whither Miss Barstow and young Taylor had betaken themselves, and, resigning himself, he listened to the trite commonplaces of Helen's mother.

"Phil," Rosamond was saying, "I am bored. There

is too much music in this opera." Then she laughed. "You might tell me something new—you might even make love to me," she continued persuasively.

"I dare not do that," he said in mock seriousness. "But I will discuss love in the abstract with you, if you like."

"Very well,"—this resignedly. "Anything would be better than having to give one's attention to the opera. I abhor music. I almost wish I had gone to the theatre with the Dexters. By the way, are you going to supper there to-night?"

"I believe I am," he answered. "Tell me, Rose, if you hate music, why on earth did you come here?"

"To see *her,*" she said, indicating Helen with a nod. "And you?"

He did not respond, but she went on just as if he had.

"*Et tu, Brute!*" she launched playfully.

"Well, what do you think of her now that you have seen her?" he asked.

"What I think of her is of no consequence to any one but myself. What she thinks of me is much more to the point."

"I don't see what you are driving at."

"Don't you? It 's very simple," she replied in low tones. "I believe that platonic affection is not only possible but an assured fact. Now the question is, does she?"

"My dear Rose, why don't you ask her? That is the easiest way to find out. Would you mind writing it all out for me, as I——"

"Dear Phil, you know I don't want to lose you," she murmured.

"But you never said you cared for me, and I——"

"That is where the shoe pinches," she said absent-mindedly.

"I give it up, but I hope you know best."

Rose was silent, and Philip looked involuntarily at Helen.

During the latter part of the last act Helen's attention began to wander. For the first time, she became aware that the music was not satisfying enough to hold her interest, to the exclusion of aught else. A feeling of weariness possessed her and she longed for the evening to come to an end. This new mood caused her to remove her eyes from the stage and glance about at the faces of the audience, noting, with casual eye, the varying degrees of interest she saw displayed there.

Suddenly her eyes met those of a man in the box directly opposite. They were fixed on her as if fascinated, and she shivered involuntarily. Her feeling of weariness gave way to one of repulsion, so great that she drew back and closed her eyes to relieve the sudden faintness which attacked her.

Who was this man and what had he to do with her? She disliked him instinctively and without reason—unless his fantastic ugliness was the cause.

She resolutely turned her eyes away, and forced herself to listen to the closing measures of the opera.

On the way home she was silent. The memory of that pair of eyes which had seemed to be peering into her very soul still haunted her, and she could not shake off the curious effect they had produced.

"You enjoyed your evening, Helen, I could see that," her mother said. "It will be one long to be remembered, I am sure."

"Yes mother, it was delightful. I shall never forget it." But the girl's tone was colorless, and her mother,

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thinking her merely tired, did not say anything further, but watched her rather wistfully, as the young girl ascended the stairs, listlessly and in silence.

Helen was tired, but had she known that still another pair of eyes had been hungrily devouring her throughout the whole evening, she would have been even more disturbed than she was at present.

II

THE Carrington Home had been founded by Lionel Carrington with money left by his mother. He had always been her favorite, while Stephen, the younger son, a cripple from his birth, was left much to himself, to develop as best he could. The father, from whom Mrs. Carrington had been separated some years before her sons grew up, had been forgotten by all three, save Stephen who resembled him. He had a faint remembrance of a man whom he had called father—a man with sad, dreamy eyes, who was much away from home; one who played for hours on his piano, and who, it is said, had married his wife for her money, giving up the woman he had long loved for the glitter of gold and the material advantages it would bring. After the birth of his second son, he had become estranged from his wife. His many absences caused comment, so, heart-sick and weary, he sought more and more the society of the woman who understood and loved him, until his wife, who now hated him, brought suit for divorce on the ground of desertion.

Lionel had more of his mother's characteristics. Like her he was practical, in earnest with the affair of the moment; like her, too, he was hard and unscrupulous.

The home consisted of a long rambling set of buildings. The main structure contained the offices, five private rooms, and the kitchen at the back separated by a short covered way. The one-story wings were also detached from each end of the main house by a pergola. The surrounding grounds were extensive, and a fine view of the country, which stretched out like a checker-

board, was obtained from the south, with a back-ground of trees in the rear.

When Helen stepped off the train the next afternoon, she stopped but a moment to ask her way of the station agent, who stood at the door looking after the departing train, with a piece of match-stick held between his teeth.

"Straight up the hill, first turn to the right. You can 't miss it," he said, pointing over his shoulder with his ink-stained thumb.

She heard the door bang before she had taken many steps. A sudden quiet fell once more over the scene.

"I should like to know where the two old men went who were leaning against the station, and the little boy who stared at me so," wondered Helen indolently, as she mounted the hill. "The men just slipped into the ground and the boy—vanished into thin air, I suppose!"

As she entered the gate at the home, Helen paused and looked at the view, then mounted the steps and rang the bell. There was no response for a moment, and she moved aside and tried to peer through the muslin curtains which shaded the windows, but could distinguish nothing, as their texture was too thick. She listened and heard voices. A passing step sounded within, so she rang again. The door opened, and an orderly of the hospital looked lazily out.

"Is Miss Teniel in?" asked Helen.

"Yes, she is," he answered. "Please walk into that room, and I 'll call her. Are you a patient or——"

"I am not. Tell her it's Miss Mainwaring."

"You 're a visitor then. I thought you did n't look ill. Take a chair. I 'll tell her."

She listened to his shuffling step as he made his way

along the corridor, and seated herself, looking curiously about her.

At first sight the room seemed almost severe in its simplicity, for the few pieces of furniture it boasted of did not give any idea of comfort. A roll-top desk and, in the corner, a typewriting machine, gave a touch of modern business which told her at a glance that she had been shown into Maud's office.

Helen rose and moved to the window. It was a dreary outlook at present, for it was the late fall. Her thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of Miss Teniel.

"Really, Helen, I was so surprised to hear you were here. Why did n't you let me know you were coming?"

"I was not sure whether I could come——"

"But you should have telephoned. You did not think we were savages, I suppose?"

"No, of course not. However, don't let us discuss that. First I want some tea, and then can I see the hospital? Will that be breaking the rules?" asked Helen laughing.

"My dear girl, nothing of the kind. Now that I have you here, you must see everything. Are you interested in such work. You know I love it."

"I know you do, and I want to see whether I should like it, too."

"I hope you will, but I am too busy to do more today than take you through with me."

"Perhaps I had better leave you, then."

"No," said Miss Teniel, "for tea is coming now, and we have ample time to talk for a little while. You know I have not seen you for ages. Then," she continued, as she pulled out a small table on which the tea-tray, which was brought in at this moment, was

placed, "you shall go all over the hospital. It is the day for inspection, and Mr. Carrington comes to get my report afterwards."

"Very well, I am in your hands. But do give me some tea before it gets too strong. As it is, I expect to jump to-night."

"You jump! My dear Helen, I don't believe you would be capable of doing such a thing. What a queer girl you are! I often wonder what you are really like inside."

Helen sipped her tea reflectively.

"We were sorry you could not come last night. The music was delightful," she said abruptly.

"I haven't the slightest doubt of it, but I could not get away, owing to the operation," answered Maud.

Helen was moved by something in the other's voice to ask what the operation was.

"A woman died in childbirth," was the quiet answer. "There was some complication."

"How terrible!"

"Yes, and very serious indeed."

"Did she suffer?" asked Helen.

"Yes, she suffered untold agony."

"How can you speak so calmly of such an occurrence," said Helen, after a pause. "I should think you would have felt shocked. Don't you mind such scenes?"

"Dear Helen," replied Maud, smiling gently, "they are horrible, of course, but one grows accustomed to them. We look at such things from the view point of science alone, you see. We study the suffering and apply the remedy."

"Yes, I can understand that. In time, I suppose, I should grow accustomed to it, too, but it seems horri-

ble to me now. I know that, if I were a nurse, I should hate to lose a case."

"Yes, that is hard," answered Maud, rising. "I wept when I lost my first case, I remember, but I was younger then and less experienced. Come, I am going through the wards now. Do you wish to come?"

"Yes, I should like to above all things."

The inspection was by no means perfunctory, and Helen could not help admiring the tact, the innate kindliness and business-like thoroughness with which Miss Teniel performed her duties. Nothing was neglected, neither the receiving-rooms, the operating-rooms, the wards, the corridors or the private rooms. When they entered the room in which the woman had died, Helen shivered. She saw Maud approach the bed and look long at the still form, then noticed that she drew a wedding ring off the dead woman's hand, and bent down to examine the tiny features of the child more minutely. Suddenly she started back with a low cry, and hastily covered the two figures again. Then she slipped the ring on her finger and they quickly left the room and closed the door.

"What was the matter, Maud? Why did you cry out?" asked Helen, in wonder.

"I cannot answer you. I received a severe shock. Well—I will tell you, but don't laugh at me, I could not bear it. I thought for an instant the child was—alive. I saw almost at once I had been—mistaken."

"Maud, look at me!" exclaimed Helen severely. "You are not telling me the truth, and that is not like you."

"No, dear, I was not telling the truth; but I cannot say any more now."

Helen still felt puzzled as she followed Miss Teniel during the remainder of the inspection. There had

been something which she did not understand, some mystery which prudence told her had better not be explained at present.

When they at last returned to the office, she saw that the room was no longer untenanted. A man was standing by the window, and at their entrance he turned towards them. Helen divined that this must be Lionel Carrington.

"I saw you," he said abruptly, "last night at the Opera."

"Yes?" Her tone was indifferent.

"I had no idea that I should have the opportunity of meeting you so soon."

Helen did not answer, but looked fixedly out of the window.

With a faint shrug Carrington turned to Miss Teniel, and heard her report of the condition of the hospital.

"And what became of the woman you telephoned me about?" he inquired.

"She died," answered Miss Teniel briefly.

"But the child—I think you said there was a child——?"

"The child is dead, too. It was a very beautiful boy."

She glanced at him as she spoke, but he had already turned away and did not see her searching look. Helen heard him whistle softly, and wondered. She turned to Maud and said:

"I have some time before the train goes, and I think I shall take a stroll about the grounds. Good-bye, Maud dear, I shall certainly come again. I have been much interested." After embracing her friend warmly, she nodded quietly to Carrington and left the room.

"What am I to put in my report about this woman's

death?" asked Miss Teniel, after she deemed the pause had lasted long enough.

"You have your usual form," answered Carrington testily. "Fill that out. Why do you ask?"

"It would be impossible to do that as I have not all the necessary data."

"What is missing?" he inquired, without looking in her direction. "You know the date of admission, the woman's condition, the cause of death, the number of her room, and the usual routine information, do you not? What is missing?"

"Two facts," she said, regarding him steadily. "One is if she was married, which is presupposed but not established. We are not a 'Midnight Mission' or 'Door of Hope,' you know. That is not within our province, as I understand the rules. Correct me if I am wrong. The second and most important thing is that we do not know who the woman was."

"As to the first fact, is there any evidence to show that she was a married woman?"

"Yes, this," replied Maud, taking the ring from her finger and holding it out to him.

"A wedding ring!" he exclaimed. "It would serve as a means of identification. Have you examined it to see if there was any information to be gained from it?"

"Yes, but there is no date or initial inside."

"Then it does not help us much," he said, suppressing a yawn.

"Still, the presence of a wedding ring gives the impression that she was a married woman, and it could safely be deduced that her child was born in wedlock, could n't it?" she persisted. "But her name.

Who is she? Can you tell me that?" she asked boldly, as he did not answer.

"Yes," he replied readily, to her astonishment. "I know of her, but not directly."

"Can you tell me of any one who could supply the information?"

"Not for certain, but I believe that my brother could throw some light on the subject. I don't wish to discuss family secrets, though," he said, smiling.

"Then," remarked Maud, unmoved, "we may take fact number one as accepted, if not proved; but fact number two is not known. The woman must be entered as 'unknown.' Does that meet with your aproval?"

"Yes, that is correct enough, I fancy. Well, I must be off. Good-bye. I shall look in as usual to-morrow."

After he had gone, Miss Teniel wrote out her report carefully, fastened it to that of the resident, put her papers in order, and leaned back in her chair to review the conversation she had just had with her superior. She considered him a scoundrel, but had little to support that opinion, except that the face of the dead baby had borne a startling resemblance to Carrington's. On the other hand, Lionel's entire and loyal interest had been given to the management of this home, and he had proved to be quite equal to the responsibility which had been placed in him. Whatever were the actual facts, she could not say, but she made up her mind to find out the truth. With this resolution she closed her desk with a decisive snap and locked it.

Meanwhile Helen, having exhausted the possibilities of the grounds, was making her way leisurely to the station, her mind occupied in trying to solve the mystery of Maud's action in that gruesome room of death. Why had she been so secretive? She had very clumsily

attempted to conceal something she had discovered. What was it? Doubtless it was some strange phenomenon interesting to medicine, but what? When Helen reached this point in her cogitations, she looked up and found that she had almost arrived at the station. Mr. Carrington was already pacing the platform. She remembered having noticed a cloud on his face just before she left, but it had vanished when she bade him good-bye, and she had wondered what had caused it.

"Excuse me, Miss Mainwaring, but may I get you a ticket, or have you bought a return?" he said.

She did not show that she was annoyed, for of course he could not know that she wished to be alone, or that she, for no especial reason, did not like him; so she answered quietly that she had a ticket, but she did not move to make way for him on the bench upon which she had seated herself.

Lionel Carrington smiled and, instead of leaving her to her devices, stood beside her and entered into conversation.

"I am glad to see you out here, and I hope you will become interested in the home. It is my pet work and means a great deal to me, as its fulfilment was my mother's wish."

"What a pity it is that we cannot always live to see our hopes realized!" she said. "It is usually the things we most want to see done which we know will not be completed in our time."

"Yes," he replied. "I am now developing a plan for the home's welfare which I feel instinctively I shall never live to see in its entirety."

As he explained to her the scheme for improvement, she could not help seeing how self became of less importance to him, and how his interest in his life's

work became more and more paramount. He had not ordinarily a good face, although a handsome one, but when he talked of the home his expression changed for the better.

"So you see," he said in conclusion, "it will be impossible to work out such details, which seem to multiply rather than decrease, in a short time. It will take years before I can look on it as finished and ready to be in operation."

"Yes, I see," she agreed, "but you have a splendid co-worker in Miss Teniel."

"Yes, I have," he responded briefly, and lapsed into sudden silence. Suddenly he said: "You will excuse me but I find I must return to the hospital. I have forgotten my stick." And he laughed awkwardly.

When the train stopped, he helped her in, and as it moved slowly off she carried with her the remembrance of him standing there, looking straight before him. Then he turned and made his way up the hill again. He was going back to look for the last time on the face of the woman he had betrayed, and who weakly trusting and loving him to the bitter end, had died at last for his sake.

III

MRS. VAN ALSTYNE was having a few people to dine, a little dinner with "bridge afterwards," as the notes of invitation read. The ladies and two of the men were awaiting the arrival of the last guest.

"Stephen is always late. It 's a bad habit he has, but, so far as I have been able to discover, it is his only one. I hope you don't mind waiting?" asked the hostess, laughing.

"We never wait for him more than five minutes," said Rosamond, "but, then, we always tell him that dinner is at eight, if we are dining at eight-thirty. Don't mind me. I had tea at the Mordaunts'—a heavy meal I call it. Since they returned from England, where they spent six weeks in the autumn, they have taken to doing that kind of thing, and then dine at nine."

"I think that is a very good way, if one is n't going on to a play. I like a great many of the English customs," remarked Mrs. Van Alstyne, "such as living mostly in the country and coming to town only for the season. I hope Stephen will soon turn up, for I am beginning to feel hungry. How about you, Helen?"

"Oh, I don't mind waiting, but I must confess I am a little hungry, too, though I did have a cup of tea at home."

"Well, I shall not wait any longer. Twenty minutes is long enough, except for royalty." And the hostess rose and rang the bell.

"I wish every one had the strength of mind to do that," said Findlay, laughing.

"Yes," exclaimed Taylor, "so do I. I 've been to dinners where I thought we were never going in."

"My dear Phil," remarked Mrs. Van Alstyne, "you are just as spoilt as you can be. The young men of the present day are. There, now, let 's go in. Here comes Simmons to tell us dinner is ready."

At this moment a ring at the front door was heard, and the hostess, who had risen, paused.

"Don't move, any one," she said in a spirit of mischief. "We must n't embarrass the poor fellow too much. Ah, here he is. Well, Mr. Carrington, it is good of you to be so prompt."

"Which means," he replied, taking her outstretched hand, "that I am unpardonably late. I am sorry. Tell me I am forgiven."

Mrs. Van Alstyne smiled.

"We were saying before you came in that one never waits long for any one except royalty——" began Rosamond.

"But royalty is never late," interposed Taylor.

"Come, do take my part," asked Carrington, appealing to his hostess. "I asked you to forgive me, you know."

"And I do freely," she replied, tapping him playfully with her fan. "Of course you know every one. Rosamond, Taylor, Findlay, and Helen Mainwaring."

"Miss Mainwaring I have not met before," he answered, bowing to her rather gravely, "the others I know."

"Well, you must be nice to Helen," answered Mrs. Van Alstyne, "We are going to play bridge after dinner, and she says she does n't care for it, so you must amuse her until we are finished." And she led the way into the dining-room.

Helen's sensations when Carrington had walked into the room had been somewhat confused and indefinite. She had sat there quietly, glad that the attention of the others had not been directed towards her. Later, as she glanced idly about the pretty table, she forced herself to smile faintly as he spoke to her.

"I am sorry you do not like cards," he was saying, "but don't be depressed. I shall cut in later."

"Do you think you will find me as tiresome as that? I do not see why you begin by making excuses," she answered, without looking in his direction.

"I——" he began, and then paused.

"Come, Mr. Carrington, don't let us start at cross purposes."

"What else are you interested in?" he asked, after a pause.

"I am very fond of music," she answered, somewhat irritated by the indefinite quality of his tone.

"Music! Ah, there we have something in common."

She was at once struck by his ardor. He must care a great deal for music to speak so about it, she thought.

"I can see that you are really a lover of music," she said dreamily, "for you speak of it as if it meant something to you. To me it is almost a part of my life."

"Have you ever thought of taking up music as a profession?"

"Yes," answered Helen, "but the study of music is exacting, and it is almost impossible to pursue it earnestly unless one is in a musical centre. One must go abroad for that, and I have never been able to get to the actual point of going. It means—expatriating oneself, you see."

"I have been wondering whether that would really

be necessary. Here in our very midst there exists a society of musicians, cultivated and——"

"Yes," interposed Helen, "but you have your own society as well. You could n't cut yourself off from that, and unless you did you could n't give yourself up to the most fascinating of all studies."

"I am afraid you are right, Miss Mainwaring. In order to do anything thoroughly, something which requires concentration, we must put ourselves in an atmosphere congenial to success. I feel with you that, however earnest we might wish to be, this busy throbbing city is no place for serious work—unless it is connected with business. Our American cities are becoming mere centres of industry, and the up-to-date business man has no time for recreation or the refinements of life."

"I think that is rather sweeping," remarked Helen coldly. "I don't know what sort of people you habitually meet," she continued. "Probably commercial men who return home tired out and whose only thought is to be amused. Most people's lives are strenuous, I admit, but that should not prevent us from knowing of any other side."

"The artistic side, you mean?" he asked.

"Yes, and of a deeper one still," she responded; "of the useful."

"I hope I don't look as surprised as I feel," remarked Carrington, "but so few men have leisure for either art or usefulness nowadays."

"That is true, unfortunately," said Helen, "for the larger part are entirely absorbed by the endless task of adding to their incomes. Is it worth while to ruin one's health by over-work, and all for the sake of having a few more thousands a year to spend?"

"Ah, but we can't live without money!" protested Stephen. "And the more we have, the more we want."

"Perhaps that is merely a phase of modern human nature. It is a pity, though, that men don't care enough about those other pursuits we have been discussing to take time to improve themselves."

"Really, Miss Mainwaring, it is you who are severe now, but I must say there is a good deal of truth in what you say."

"It is what I believe," she remarked casually, as she turned away and began a conversation with Findlay, who was seated on her other side.

Stephen smiled, for she stimulated him, magnetized him, led him on without knowing it. Was he already in love with her? No, but immeasurably interested and attracted. So this man, deceived himself, as thousands of others have done. He would not acknowledge that deep within him was the knowledge that he already cared for her, as a man who loves but once.

"I don't think it 's polite to look about the table when I am talking to you," whispered Rosamond to Phil. "It 's very good of me to notice you as it is, and I might just as well be conversing with the flowers, ungrateful man!"

"I beg pardon," said Taylor contritely, "I was thinking——"

"How lovely she is," replied Miss Barstow banteringly. "And I have asked you three times what you thought of her! You are the most fickle man I know."

"You 're unjust. I told you once I thought she was the most attractive woman I had ever met, 'present company,' of course. How sharp you are!"

"I agree with you that she is a most beautiful creature,

but beauty, you know, is only skin deep. Don't fall in love with her. Take my warning and advice."

"Just a little bit jealous?" asked Phil.

"Oh, no, indeed! I jealous? What an idea!" exclaimed Rosamond, laughing. "I only want to keep you out of harm's way—and," she added to herself, "lead you on a little in her direction. Men always do what you don't want them to do."

"What deep games you play sometimes, Rose! I always know they 're very deep when I can't follow you."

"Don't try to make me out to be complex. I am awfully shallow, you know. Never try to make mountains out of mole-hills. I am a mole-hill."

"You are a good friend, that 's all I know, and all I want to know."

"Come," said Mrs. Van Alstyne, rising. "Mr. Carrington has promised to play for us while we have coffee. He never takes it, you know. Afterwards we 'll have some bridge."

It was some fifteen minutes later before Helen realized that the others had disappeared, and that she alone was listening to the last strains of Liszt's arrangement of the "Liebestod."

"I never knew, I never guessed, it could be so lovely," she sighed, like one awakening to consciousness from a dream. "You are a true artist and a great one. It is nonsense for you to talk of going abroad. You are finished now."

"Thank you," he answered. "Still, I had thought of going. One can always learn more, you know. It is hard to make up one's mind, though."

Helen was strangely silent. She was still under the influence of the music. Presently rising, she walked

slowly across the room. Carrington followed, but did not dare break in on her reverie. He waited until she had seated herself again, and then he sat down near her.

"One should have some great interest in life," she said earnestly. "One feels the need of it."

"And have you found yours yet?" he asked softly.

"No," answered Helen, as if speaking to herself; "but"—looking up—"men and women should not fritter away their lives in mere pleasure. Every one should have work which appeals to him."

"But something must have suggested itself to you. You must have something at the back of your mind—" persisted Stephen.

"I think I have," answered Helen thoughtfully. "I have paid several visits to Miss Teniel lately, and I think I might become very much interested in the Carrington Home."

"That is my brother's fad. I take absolutely no interest in it."

Helen was struck by the stiffness of his tone, and she could not forbear asking him why he spoke so coldly.

"I have a reason," he said sternly, after a pause. "But family matters are never interesting, so I would rather not pursue the subject further."

Helen felt the earnestness in his tone, so, although her curiosity was aroused, she desisted from probing deeper and fell once more into silence, which Carrington was too much absorbed to notice. Not long afterwards Findlay entered the room.

"Mrs. Van wants you to cut in, Carrington, so run along; they are waiting for you. Besides it 's my innings, old man."

"Did you win? I feel certain you did. You look too cheerful for a loser," said Helen to Findlay.

"I like that!" responded Findlay, laughing. "Why, women lose with a much worse grace than men. You would never know whether I had lost or won. As a matter of fact, I did win, but we were only playing penny points."

"I was right, then. But I don't like the way you speak about women. It isn't fair."

"But it is true. Women hate to lose."

"I have never lost," she admitted, "and I don't believe I should like it."

"A man doesn't like losing either, but he forces himself to be philosophic. Now a woman cannot bear defeat."

"Oh, you men!" exclaimed Helen scornfully. "You are always so sure of yourselves. I never knew a man yet to be in the wrong——"

"And I suppose, if he were, you think that he would never acknowledge it."

"How did you know I thought that?" asked Helen quickly. "Well, and am I not right?"

"No, I don't agree with you entirely, for I think better of my sex than that. You have evidently a poor opinion of us."

"I don't think my opinion would be of interest to you," began Helen, "so I am not going to tell you what I think. Perhaps I don't care enough about it to give an opinion," she challenged.

"That 's hard on us!" exclaimed Findlay laughing, "I shall have to think about educating you."

"That might be a good deal of a bore—not to me but to you; still," she said, rising, "I am not so con-

ceited as to think I can't be improved. I am, on the contrary—anxious to learn."

She passed into the next room and bade adieu to her hostess.

Upon reaching home, Helen considered all that had happened that day, so it was late before she felt sleepy. It was the memory of the music which finally soothed her and absorbed the picture of Carrington. As the melodies grew fainter, she sank deeper and deeper into a dreamless sleep.

IV

THE building which is occupied by the fashionable Cosmos Club on Fifth Avenue is too well-known to need minute description. The hall, with its sumptuous yet solid furnishings; the main club-room, the smaller rooms, the reading and card-rooms, and the admirably stocked library, are in themselves as famous as the club cuisine and its noiseless, efficient service. Everywhere one sees the rich but subdued tones which lend an air of comfort and luxury to the whole.

On a certain afternoon about the middle of February, the principal room whose windows look on the avenue, was filled to overflowing, every coveted chair by the windows being occupied, while up-stairs in the card-room as many as seven games of bridge were in progress. Servants were dispensing refreshments in the form of liquids, both innocuous and more or less insinuating.

There was continual movement, men coming and going, while above the babel several voices rose insistently. Among these was easily distinguishable the resonant quality of Lionel Carrington's.

"The cause of death given by the resident physician was blood-poisoning, but from what he told me later I fancy a clot of blood had formed in one of the large arteries back of the heart."

"But, Carrington, my dear fellow," exclaimed a prominent medical man, "only an autopsy could reveal the presence of such a blood-clot. Was such an autopsy held?"

"If there was one, I did not notice it on the official report," was the answer. "I must speak to the resident.

If he believed the blood-clot actually caused the woman's death, it should appear in the report. Perhaps he thought I had added it."

"But it is the business of the resident to make out the report. The superintendent merely approves of it," said the doctor.

"Quite so. I will look into it," was the hasty rejoinder.

No one noticed that Stephen had entered the room, and was listening to the foregoing conversation.

"Did you know who the woman was?" he asked quietly.

"No, I did not," answered Lionel. "It was some one I had never seen before."

Stephen shrugged his shoulders slightly as his brother turned away, but shortly afterwards went over to a table, chose a magazine, and seated himself, selecting a chair from which he could command a view of the whole room. He appeared merely to be slowly turning over the pages of his periodical. One would have said he was looking for something which he could not find.

Meanwhile the conversation had turned from medical matters to those of more general interest.

"I remember a case of a young man who lost a large amount of money at cards—more than he could afford," Major Dubois was saying. "He informed his hostess he could not pay then. The information was not, to say the least, received gracefully. The young man in distress came to me, and, to make a long story short, I agreed to pay his debt on condition that he never touched a card again. He never has since that night."

"You believe that?" asked Lionel. "Well, all I can say is, he was a fool. But you knew what you were doing, I suppose."

"Yes, I did, young man," answered the major, "and I will trouble you to remember that there is a certain amount of deference due to an older man. It is a fact which is occasionally forgotten at the present day."

"By jove! the old boy was sharp," exclaimed Carrington, when the major had stalked off. "I certainly got it worse than I deserved."

"Well, I must be going," announced the doctor shortly, "I have a case to see before dinner."

A room in one of the better known clubs during the afternoon hours between four and seven is like a kaleidoscope. The card players, having finished their rubbers, play over their game to willing or reluctant ears. Later on, the golfers, many of whom are enthusiastic enough to keep up their game during the winter, enter and plunge into a recital of their woes or successes. Their audience feels as if caught in a trap. One of the unfortunate listeners is foolish enough to attempt a rejoinder, but is stunned by the whirlwind of answering sound which, like a very torrent of technical phrases, assails him.

In another group, we have the business man. The air about him is filled with fragments of mysterious phrases, the language of "Change" and the "Street." The ones who talk the most are those who transact the least volume of business.

It is, in fact, a world in miniature, with its component parts clearly defined. Here is the nucleus of a literary set, each one discussing his abstruse individual sensations, or advancing new theories, the lesser lights shining forth serene and undisturbed in the glare of the greater luminaries. In another part of the room are congregated the artists, miniature painters, makers of portraits, and even those who design covers and posters, mingling

with their more fortunate brethren on terms of temporary equality. Only lovely woman is absent, but it is possible and not improbable that she is the subject of many discourses, for there is a sprinkling of men of leisure present, belonging ostensibly to the genus man, but classed more specifically as of those who frequent afternoon tea-parties.

The room in the Cosmos Club was thinning out, but still Stephen read on, having apparently found what he was in search of, while his brother remained the centre of an ever-changing group, consuming endless cigarettes and imbibing many drinks. When Lionel finally rose to go Stephen walked back to the table and tossed his periodical down, then followed his brother to the door.

"Lionel, I must speak to you. If you are going to your rooms, I wish to come, too."

"I don't suppose I could prevent you, so I need not try," was the sullen answer.

Stephen did not reply, but followed his brother. So these two of the same blood walked along side by side, down Fifth Avenue to the corner of 38th Street, in silence.

It was strange to find two natures sprung from the same stock and yet so dissimilar. Yet there were certain minor characteristics, indefinable tricks of manner, which they possessed in common. Stephen knew his brother had been drinking somewhat freely, but he knew his man and just how to treat him; and that is why he refrained from speech until they faced each other in Lionel's apartments. Stephen was not timid, but his nature was the retiring one of the artist. He was very chary about beginning an attack, though he could hold his own with the best when aroused. Lionel, on the

other hand, was fearless outwardly, yet a coward at heart. Stephen was, therefore, apprehensive of the coming interview and was undecided how to begin. He felt that ugly words would have to be spoken on both sides, but he was anxious to avoid an open rupture.

"You said you had something to say to me," Lionel said. "Well! what is it?" The tone of the question was little short of brutal.

"Lionel, you remember my father?" Stephen spoke at random, for he had not yet decided how to lead up to what he wished to say.

"Can't say I do. What next?"

"He never loved our mother. It was her money which blinded him," was the reply, couched in an apologetic tone.

Lionel looked sharply at his brother.

"Well?" was all he said.

"He deceived himself. He threw away his happiness for the questionable possession of an empty and useless bauble."

"Why should you speak of this now?"

"Because—I wish to. Our mother hated him, and she showed it by leaving the money to you to found the home. You were always the favorite."

"What the devil are you driving at?" asked Lionel tensely.

"It was a case of spite on her part, cowardly and unmeaning," continued Stephen, unmoved. "That is why I have never taken any interest in the hospital."

"There never was much love lost between you and my mother, that's a fact."

The use of the especial pronouns was evidently intentional, and therein one could read, learn, and inwardly digest. Both men had seated themselves. The

expression of Lionel's face was distinctly evil, while Stephen trembled with ill-suppressed rage, although he had the strength to keep himself well in hand. He ignored his brother's remark, and proceeded quickly.

"That is why I never cared to go to the hospital. I went there the other day, though."

"Why?"

"Because I had read the notice of a sudden death which took place there and I was curious."

"Why?"

"I went to satisfy my curiosity."

"And was it satisfied, may I ask?" inquired Lionel, with a sneer.

"It was."

"Oh, it was, was it?" asked his brother.

"Quite. Why did you tell that lie in the club to-day? It did n't deceive me."

The characters of the two men were very faithfully depicted at this moment by their facial expressions. As Stephen gained in courage, Lionel breathed a trifle more quickly, and his lips were drawn back tight against his teeth. His color, too, was a shade more gray than formerly, but he did not flinch. Both men had risen involuntarily and were slowly approaching each other, but their actions were totally unconscious.

When Stephen saw that his brother was aware of his meaning, he took the pleasure of holding him off, though Lionel, not averse to fencing if it would gain him a few minutes' respite, stood on his guard, at bay.

"Yes," pursued Stephen, more quietly, "I went to the home the next day after reading the notice. Miss Teniel took me to one of the private rooms. I viewed the two corpses, and the mother I recognized, but I said nothing."

"I told Miss Teniel you doubtless knew who the dead woman was. She was Linda Breitmann; of course I was aware of that."

Lionel's bravado was splendid, but it did not for a moment deceive Stephen.

"It was like you to say I might know something about it, but it did not strengthen your case. I believe Miss Teniel knows the truth."

"How?" snapped Lionel suspiciously.

"No, I did not tell her; however, I know that she knows—the truth. But have no fear; Maud will not betray you."

"I always thought that woman dangerous, now I know it," exclaimed Lionel angrily. "She has gone too far this time. I shall think about making a change."

"And that she knows you will never dare do," sneered Stephen. "She knows you too certainly and surely for the coward that you are——"

"You hound!" exclaimed the desperate man, as he seized his brother by the throat; but as there was no answering struggle, his grip relaxed, and he turned aside with an ugly laugh.

At this moment Stephen, agitated though he was, could not help admiring the almost real assumption of courage his brother was displaying, although he cordially detested and despised him. He read one fact clearly: he held his brother in his power to do with as he pleased.

"Do not be afraid," he said softly. "I shall never betray you, but I cannot save you if another thinks it necessary to speak out."

Stephen turned away and, walking to the desk, took up a pen, which he fingered aimlessly.

"What I want and what I must have," he began, "is an undertaking in writing that you——"

"I will not put my name to any paper, incriminating or otherwise," was the angry reply, "so you may surrender any such idea."

"I must have some assurance that other women——"

"Shall be safe from me?" said Lionel stiffly. "Well, why don't you say it? Don't be afraid of offending me."

"That is not exactly what I meant," answered Stephen, in some confusion, "but I feel I had better not explain."

"Perhaps you had better not," was the icy reply.

Stephen Carrington lingered, although he had nothing further to say. He felt that he had not gained much, but he consoled himself with the thought that he had not lost anything appreciable either. The situation was unchanged, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had not only read his brother a lecture, but forced him to listen to it.

"One more word," he said, making a final effort to control his voice, and buoying himself up by sheer courage born of despair, "don't tell lies again. It does n't do any good. You 're sure to be found out and——"

"Silence!" roared Lionel, at white heat, "or by Heaven I 'll close your mouth forever——"

"No, I will not be silent," answered Stephen quietly. "I have a conscience if you have not."

Lionel's fists clenched, but he turned away.

"Good-bye," said Stephen. "I have finished."

"Ah, have you?" answered Lionel ironically. "Don't come here again," he called down the stairs after him. "You 're not wanted."

Lionel paced up and down excitedly. His mood was changing, however, and his anger subsiding. Under-

neath the cold, hard exterior he was but a man, and feeling almost extinct glimmered. After a time he grew calmer, and, drawing near his desk, he sat down and stared straight before him. His expression was enigmatical, his demeanor cold. What were the thoughts which rankled within him? Who can tell? He was alone and could afford to drop the mask. Presently he did so, for, all at once, his head bent forward until it dropped upon his outspread arms. And the room was very still, despite the strange beating of a man's heart. Was remorse gripping him, or was some deeper emotion at work? Just as suddenly his mood changed. He rose and, throwing back his head, burst into uncontrollable laughter. Then, after a few turns about the room, he flung himself into the inner chamber and rang the bell for his servant.

V

MISS ROSAMOND BARSTOW stepped from her miniature brougham at half past four o'clock one afternoon a few days later, and slowly ascended the steps of her mother's house on Washington Square. She told the servant who opened the door to bring tea at five o'clock, and that she would receive any one who came; then she made her way up-stairs and rang for her maid.

She was invariably at home for tea and it was understood by her friends that her standing invitation to drop in was a general one. On this especial day she had told but one man to come, but if he bored her, or she did not find him as entertaining as she had hoped, it was quite on the cards that some one else might turn up.

It was not, however, until a quarter past five that Lionel Carrington was announced, and Rosamond had already had her first cup of tea.

"You must think we women hold ourselves very cheap ——" she said in answer to a remark Lionel had made.

"You entirely misunderstand me," he protested.

"I was not thinking of you in particular," she said, after she had subjected him to a short scrutiny over the rim of her tea-cup, "but of men in your class. As a rule, the so-called stronger sex think that all that is necessary is to beckon and——"

"You do us an injustice, and I must speak up for my sex. But it is true that man is stronger than woman. Therefore, he draws her to him naturally."

"I do not agree with you," said she reflectively, "for attraction or its opposite does not seem to me ger-

mane to the question. Can you not conceive of a man and a woman being merely friends, without thought of love or——"

"No," he said, "I cannot. You are voicing the fallacy which a great many women hold, but, like them, you forget that natural laws of selection take place just as surely among human beings as among lower animals. For reason in one case, substitute intelligence in the other, and I think you must necessarily end by agreeing with me."

"I see what you mean, but we are each of us starting from a different premise, and I do not think we can agree until we start fair. My contention is that men and women, or rather the abstract man and woman, can be friends on an intimate basis without falling in love with each other."

"In other words," he replied, "you believe in platonic affection. Have you ever put it to the test?"

"No," she said, "I have not, because I have never had the opportunity."

"I am afraid it would be a dangerous experiment to try," he answered, laughing; "at least, it would be, I know, for me."

"Have you such a low standard as that?" asked Rose.

"No," he answered, smiling. "For if a man is attracted by a woman and ends by falling in love with her, he is merely obeying the fulfilment of natural laws."

"I suppose propinquity *is* a very strong factor," she went on musingly, "but I have always thought that love so generated would never last."

"I suppose you are thinking of the case of two people on a desert island."

"No," she replied, "that is too extreme a case. People

can see a good deal of each other without being thrown on a desert island."

"Well, I know that if I found myself on such a spot and alone with a pretty woman, I should end by either loving or hating her."

"And in any case her reputation would n't be worth that!" exclaimed Rose, snapping her fingers. "And I don't say that because you are you, but because you are a man."

"That was a nasty one!"

"Well, I don't mean to be disagreeable, but I never could see why friendship had to ripen into a deeper feeling."

"I suppose women have higher ideals than men," remarked Lionel.

"No, I don't think it is that, but the age of romance seems to have passed away. Women," she said, "marry for position, for money, but——"

"Never for love, is what I feel you were about to say. What a gloomy picture! Is that the effect of higher civilization, or how do you account for it?"

"It must be the natural tendency of the age. People are too much taken up at the present time with analyzing their own individual feelings and their point of view is morally blunted."

"That seems to me a very morbid state of affairs. We have known each other for some time and we have not fallen in love. How do you account for that?"

"That proves my contention," said Rose in answer. "But then, I am a product of the age."

"I can't agree with you fully, because I—am somewhat a creature of impulse. You might be a dangerous person to try such an experiment with."

"Would I?" asked Rose, as if surprised. "I have

never yet cared for any one enough to marry him, but at any rate I do hope we shall always be friends. A woman is more sure of herself when she has a true friend to lean on. You don't know what a comfort that is. Love is the murderer of friendship," she concluded, looking down.

"How men play into women's hands!" thought Rosamond. But aloud she said: "I belong to a woman's club and you should hear what they say about woman's influence there. My remarks are mild to some of the things they give vent to."

"Some women are dangerous, I think."

"Yes, but not all." Then after a pause: "What do you think of Helen Mainwaring?"

"I don't think she is dangerous."

"That is n't what I meant," answered Rose, laughing nervously. "Of course she is n't dangerous."

Did he really think lightly of her sex, she asked herself. What did he think of her, and why did he not answer her question? He appeared to be in a brown study.

"Well, what do you think of her?" she asked sharply.

Lionel started and Rose frowned, but as it had grown darker in the room he did not notice it.

"I beg your pardon. I am afraid I am absentminded at times. You asked me what I thought of Miss Mainwaring—was n't that it?"

"Yes," said Rosamond, "I did."

"To me, she is remarkably interesting. Cold in some ways she certainly is, but I am tempted to look beneath the surface. She is very beautiful, but there is something lacking, and I don't know what it is."

"Perhaps it is a touch of the divine spark. Perhaps she has never loved."

"Every woman falls in love some time or other," objected Lionel.

"I met a beautiful woman once, abroad, who, it was said, loved no one, not ever her husband. She was supposed to have no capacity for loving."

"That is absurd, unnatural, morbid," was Carrington's only comment.

"It was a real case. I knew her subsequently very well," continued Rose unmoved.

"And do you think Miss Mainwaring is a like case?" asked Lionel, with a show of interest.

"I don't know," she answered.

Miss Barstow smiled to herself. It was a dangerous but delicious game. She did not fear for herself, however, for one never fears what one intends to carry out. Rosamond was more than half in love with Lionel already, but it did not suit her to be aware of it. That is why she continued to smile with more confidence than at first.

"I don't believe Miss Mainwaring has a worldly nature," began Carrington, "and that is why she attracts one so. A man is always spurred on to win a woman of that kind."

"I don't know anything about that. Men always say they like women who are not complex, yet they end by choosing those women who have many sides to their natures."

"You are unjust!" he cried, half rising. "But this I will say, if ever I do marry, the woman must be essentially feminine. I strongly dislike these modern products of your sex who imitate men."

"I think you would like a woman you could manage ——" began Rose, evading the point.

"Then, too," he pursued, not appearing to notice the

interruption, "I know I should feel more sympathy for a woman who has more than one object in life, besides ——"

"Being in love with you," interposed Rosamond mischievously. "Well," she went on more seriously, "the principal object is to amuse oneself, but I suppose there is another side too."

"No doubt about that in my mind." was the firm answer.

"You are very masterful," she answered, "more so than I would have imagined. The woman you marry must be an expert whip, and I should advise her not to drive you on the curb."

"Oh, come, I 'm not as bad as that! You give me a hard name."

"Well," she responded after a pause, "perhaps that is an exaggeration, but you appear to know your own mind."

"You are not exactly vacillating yourself. Why don't you decide to marry?"

"And settle down," she answered. "No, my friend, I am not a marrying woman; besides," defiantly, "I am not in love with any one."

"You would make a splendid wife though. Won't you listen to me, dear—"

"Lionel," she said gravely, "don't lead up to any awkward moment for us both. You don't care for me and——"

"You don't care for me," he retorted. "Why do you never give me a chance?"

"Because you would be doing it only as a matter of politeness. You would not be in earnest, and besides it would be useless."

"I wonder if you are speaking the truth." This gloomily. "And I am really fond of you."

"Oh! I don't mind your being that; only don't think too much about it. You would find you were making a fatal mistake."

Lionel was silent until Rosamond broke in on his reverie.

"Please light the light. Here is a box of matches. One jet is enough."

"Will you see Mr. Taylor, Miss?" inquired a servant's voice.

"Yes," answered Miss Barstow. "Show him in. Don't go, Lionel. It's only Phil. He doesn't count."

"But I must. I am afraid it is late," he replied.

"Do come again, then, but don't overstep the bounds of friendship. Remember that a friend is a rare thing, and I am proud of having one."

He was about to protest when Taylor was announced; so, with a curt nod to him, Carrington went out and descended the steps into the street.

He walked on in silence. His thoughts were evidently engrossing, but held him unwillingly, and it seemed as if he would fain throw them off.

"She could never forgive that!" he exclaimed aloud, and then gazed apprehensively about him as he slipped the latch-key into the lock and ascended to his rooms.

Helen never could be brought to accept a whited sepulchre; Rose was of a different calibre. She was—he smiled grimly—a woman of the world. Which of the two attracted him most? Did he love one only, both, or neither? Of course he had known Miss Barstow the longer, but he could not dismiss the new personality from his mind. Almost immediately he walked over to the telephone, gave the number, and waited. When finally

he had finished his conversation, a cunning smile played over his face. He had asked if Miss Mainwaring would receive him that evening and the answer could be read in his alert bearing and excited demeanor. Nevertheless, he dressed with his usual precision, walked up to his club, and dined without any undue appearance of haste. After dinner he chose a cigar and, seating himself in one of the side rooms, glanced leisurely over the evening papers.

Comparatively few men were in the room in which Carrington was sitting, so his reflections were undisturbed. He tossed the papers aside. He mentally compared the two women who were occupying his thoughts, weighing their relative values, critically, coldly, with the impassive judgment of a surgeon. Surely, he contended, he could not be in love with either if he could draw comparisons thus calmly.

Two pictures he conjured up, a if by magic. One was of a woman of the world, beautifully dressed, lovely, alluring, one who by her wit and beauty held him to the exclusion of all else, save the coldness and proud beauty of the other. That other woman had no power over him as yet, except to draw him unconsciously on, away from the first. If the lack of sympathy should disappear, if her heart would only beat a little faster for him, Helen Mainwaring could make or mar his life, and Rosamond would no longer even have the power to hold his interest. No one could tell what would be the ending.

Rosamond! Rosamond! It was the cry of a perplexed man; of one who dreads finding himself beyond his depth, knowing he cannot swim.

He rose and left the room, and made his way along the street, his mind full of subtle plans for the conquest

of Helen. Suddenly and without warning the image of Rosamond blocked his advance. When that vision had faded, the picture of the newer love, surrounded by a score of sighing swains, spurred his lagging footsteps. Could it be that Rosamond, the temptress, already loved him, and was he hurrying on to his destruction? He was still in a quandary when he rang the bell of Mrs. Mainwaring's house in 55th Street.

VI

THE drawing-room into which Lionel Carrington was ushered showed the exercise of considerable taste. It was a reproduction of the period of Louis Quinze, and even the minutest details were thoroughly correct.

He turned abruptly from his study of the room and sat down to think, for he must review his plan of attack. First and foremost, no word of love must be allowed to obtrude itself. Subjects of conversation should always be introduced naturally and without suspicion of design.

It was strange that a man of his intelligence should not have realized that such a course of procedure lowered his moral standard. He doubtless would have explained his action by saying that she was on a pedestal, as far as he was concerned, which he desired earnestly to reach.

A light step made him turn, and he rose to greet Helen as she entered the room.

"You must have thought I was never coming down," she said. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting."

"You need not apologize. The few minutes have not seemed long."

She made no reply, but waited for him to speak. As he remained silent, she remarked casually:

"It is curious that we both should have had this evening free."

"Yes," he answered slowly, "but I am glad you were at home. It is good of you to see me."

"Is there any reason why I shouldn't see you?"

And then; "I have been dining out a good deal lately," she concluded somewhat irrelevantly.

"Yes," he replied, dully and without enthusiasm, "it is a relief to dine at home sometimes."

"I am afraid we do a great many things in the world we don't especially care about. They become almost second nature, and one is conscious of a blank only when a break comes."

Lionel's answer was purely mechanical, for the charm of Helen's voice held him, but he was sensible only of its sweetness, of its rise and fall, with the soft cadences coming now and then like a caress. It was not until a longer pause that he looked up inquiringly.

"So you see," she continued, "that I intend to be somebody in the world, and not a mere piece of useless lumber. But tell me about the hospital."

"My dear Miss Mainwaring, that is very praiseworthy," he answered. "Of course I will, if you care to listen. There is so much that a woman can do for us—many, many things that a man would never think of, details or small and apparently unimportant things which in the long run count for even more than the larger and more obvious ones."

"Ah, that has always been one of my theories!" exclaimed Helen. "But go on. I want you to tell me your plans, the things you are dreaming of but may not develop yet, and perhaps we may discover a way to bring them nearer realization."

"Yes. For example, I am not satisfied with the management of the nurses' home, which is peculiarly your province. Then the dispensary needs remodelling, and I have a plan too for enlarging and perfecting the operating-room and improving the sterilizing department. Thousands of alterations and repairs—

petty ones to be sure—are needed, but I must have advice and help."

"I wish I could assist, but there are so many things which I have no experience in that I fear I should not be of much help—still, if there is anything that——"

"You can do a great deal," he interposed gently. "If you are really interested, you should come out whenever you feel like it. You must be frank and tell me the truth. It would be of inestimable advantage to me and yet leave you free, for you would be giving only as much of your time as your interest demanded."

"It is most kind of you, and I will certainly do what I can. But don't build too much on my ability. You must take the will for the deed, at least in the beginning. I want to be interested and occupied to a certain extent, but I am afraid I shall find the work too—engrossing."

"I have no fear of that, and, besides, I repeat, you must not forget that you are free to come and go as you please. Don't look on it as an obligation or it will be robbed of its pleasant side."

"You evidently don't know that I look on everything I do as a duty," she said by the way of protest, "not because it is primarily such, but because such a feeling is natural to me. I don't say, though, that some things cannot be made to appear less like a task, as the interest one feels takes one more and more out of oneself."

Helen was suddenly silent, and as she seemed absorbed Lionel did not try to break in on her thoughts. Knowing her as he did already, he realized that it was not often that any one had the chance of looking so clearly into the recesses of her nature. He mentally scored a point in the game in his favor. The goal,

however, was a long way off; he must fight for his position inch by inch before he could reach it, and he should, moreover, remember to play straight.

He did not consider whether it was love which inspired him, he knew only that the desire to possess, to conquer, inflamed him and urged him on. Could any woman ever really hold him? Was Helen destined to bring this miracle to pass?

Lionel knew he was unscrupulous, and usually gloried in it; but he was astute enough to perceive that in this case all his powers of diplomacy, all the firmness he possessed, would be needed to bring about success.

Like many men of his stamp, he could assume a charm of manner which might well have deceived a less well-seasoned woman than Helen Mainwaring, but his thoughts brought into play some cruel lines about his mouth, and he looked at her for the first time rather critically.

Beautiful as she undoubtedly was, the complexity of her character prevented her beauty from being her strongest point. That she was highly educated, fond of music, an intelligent reader, devouring novels, essays, reviews, memoirs, and books of travel, he well knew, but he could not imagine her as impulsive or given to flights of imagination. Her reveries were not mere dreams, and there were times when her mind was acutely active, for she evidently had great power of concentration. Such was the woman he desired and hungered for. He would have, he concluded, to teach her to love him, and this thought made him laugh aloud.

Helen looked up in surprise.

"What are you laughing at?" she asked. "A penny for your thoughts."

"They are not worth that much," he replied, "but I was thinking that most people would find it amusing, because we have been sitting here for fully two minutes without speaking."

"Would they?" she inquired indifferently, "but I don't think most people's opinions are—worth much, do you?"

"I can only hope you don't mean to be personal——"

"Certainly not," she interposed. "I was thinking of real criticism—of things, not people."

"Of course," he replied, biting his lip.

"What I cannot understand is, how any one can criticise things they don't understand."

"Criticise!" exclaimed Lionel, "that 's just what they don't do, they merely talk. It 's just part of a game. It does n't mean anything, but they think it adds to their importance."

"Yes," replied Helen, "for the best critics are those who say little, but speak to the point. They praise fairly and honestly, and refrain from picking flaws in one's work and making that weakness a pillar of strength for their own aggrandisement."

"Ah, that is the way of the world——"

"But one man's loss should never be another's gain," objected Helen.

"True," agreed Carrington, "but the world is proverbially unfair to the weak. It is best to be on top, for the under dog has a poor chance. If a man can succeed on his own merits, it is all the better; but if not, he must try and prove to others that he has those very qualities which he knows he does not possess. My dear Miss Mainwaring, the prize is for the strong in the age we live in, and not for the weak."

"That seems distinctly unfair."

"Yet it is invariably the rule. We are all, I fear, trying to deceive our neighbors and make them believe we are what we are not."

"Mr. Carrington!" protested Helen. "The world is not as you have painted it. Surely, you are using too garish colors. I fear you know a world I have no desire to form a closer acquaintance with."

Perhaps it was an evil conscience which made him recoil at her words, but it had the advantage of putting him on his guard, and showed him the necessity of avoiding topics which he wished to forget.

The sound of Helen's voice recalled him with a start.

"You must make your own rating. 'Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone.' Every one is taken too much at his or her own valuation, I grant you. The world is not very original, you will say, but it is the way of the age. A poor way, I think, but it is the fashion to believe a good deal of what one hears. A bit of gossip is to the majority nowadays the very breath in their nostrils. Still, we must not forget that we owe it to ourselves to stand and not fall."

"What a philosopher!" exclaimed Lionel, in admiration. "Where did you learn all that wisdom?"

"From the world we live in," answered Helen tersely, "where I use my natural powers of observation. It is more interesting to study than to waste time in idle curiosity."

"But what about circumstances?" interposed Carrington. "Can you not conceive of some unforseen element entering into one's life and altering one's standard, one's view-point?"

"You liken life to a stream, and think the course it follows is not predestined," retorted Helen. "I cannot

conceive of such a case, unless impulse plays an over-important part in it?"

"On the contrary, impulse is not the ruling factor, though it is not negligible. A stream in its progress meets with an unexpected barrier which deflects it, and often forms a new channel."

"But what is the agency which does this?" asked Helen. "You say it is Will which determines what shall happen, and I do not agree with you. I say it is but the natural sequence of what is already pre-arranged."

"Yet action plays a great part in the scheme of our lives, and action is n't involuntary," persisted Lionel.

"I agree with you, but you are proceeding from a false premise. Our conduct, our very wills, are ordered by a force superior to any we possess."

"You are using the argument of an agnostic, but your contention falls to the ground, for you admit a force which directs, but which you cannot define. I call it Will, but you cannot name it. It is a fallacy the ancient philosophers found difficult to avoid."

"Yet the weak point in your argument is that you can't accept the infallibility of eternal decrees. We are but trifles on the sea of life and blow whither the breath of God directs. It is He who decides. What is, is."

"You are firm in your beliefs," he remarked briefly.

"I can only believe what I feel, and my ideals are what my nature teaches me," answered Helen, defiantly.

"Beware, lest you stumble and fall, before it——"

"Really, Mr. Carrington, you will force me into a biblical quotation, too, and I shall suggest something about motes and beams if you go on," remarked Helen semi-seriously.

"And then we should run into another stone-wall argument," answered Carrington, gravely. "Let us

agree to differ and say 'I told you so' later on when we see who is right."

"Very well, for I think we are both in earnest, at least I know I am. It is a good time for a truce, and a truce is perfectly proper and honorable; besides we might lose our tempers, and that would be very unpleasant."

"I suppose it *is* late, so I am afraid I must be off," he said rising. "Good-night, and thank you for an exceptionally charming evening."

As soon as Carrington had gone Helen walked over to the mantel-piece and gazed thoughtfully for some time down in to the bed of smouldering embers. Finally she looked up, as if puzzled, and, turning, slowly left the room.

VII

HELEN awoke late next morning. An electric bell close at hand would have summoned her maid, but instead of ringing it, she preferred to lie quietly with closed eyes and think. Besides, it was too pleasantly warm in bed for any exertion as yet.

Quite naturally, her mind reverted to the conversation of the previous evening. Its subject-matter appeared even now much more interesting than the man who had propounded the various theories, and she did not consider the problem of the human element, the study of his character, or his place in her scheme of life; they did not enter at present into her calculations.

Helen's expression was quizzical and rather perplexed. She and Lionel, although in the main agreeing on certain points, had been on others too anxious to maintain the position they each deemed essential. Neither of them did this, however, from a spirit of obstinacy, but because they both apparently believed in themselves. She, herself, had strong views and felt quite justified in sticking to them; so far as Carrington was concerned, she had no reason to believe that he was not as sincere as she.

Her thoughts became confused, for she was unconsciously drifting from the subject in hand nearer the man himself. She yawned, settling herself luxuriously among the soft pillows, and half stretched out the hand nearest the bell, then slowly drew it back in indecision.

She could not help thinking that Lionel had been unfair to express himself so strongly in reference to women. He seemed to forget the many members of her sex in history who had thrown aside the fetters. She

frowned, and the thought of the man with his engrossing views passed from her as she considered the women of the present, contrasting them with those of the past.

Suddenly she rang the bell at her side with a firmness which brought her maid to her presence without delay.

To the woman's light knock she gave little heed, but now she followed dreamily her every movement, noting the business-like way she moved to the window and drew up the blind or opened the shutters.

She would have liked to question this girl on many subjects which were difficult of solution, but her courage always failed at the critical moment. Was she only a machine which did the same things every day, or had she a mind with problems to work out, too? Surely, being a woman, she must have ideas of her own, dreams to dream, longings, aspirations, and a heart which beat strongly or sluggishly, as circumstances determined.

Presently the consideration of her own personality became of the utmost importance. Some power made her conscious of a difference which she could not define, but she knew instinctively that she was unlike other women. What had brought this knowledge to her, and why did it cause a feeling of unrest to rise? She knit her brows in perplexity, unable to find an answer to the question.

One has heard of tone-deafness or color-blindness, but Miss Mainwaring's state was one of soul-blindness, for she was now groping in the darkness seeking for light. What that light was she did not know, but she felt that there was some link missing, which severed her from others. But many things are incomprehensible in this world; why try to solve them?

"Everything is quite ready, Miss."

Helen started, then looked at the girl critically.

"Very well," she answered gently, "I shall get up, then. You drew my bath quite cold, I hope?"

Later on when she was seated before her dressing-table and Brixton was brushing out her long, black silky hair, she looked questioningly at her reflection in the mirror opposite. What she saw was a pair of dark gray eyes, an oval face almost colorless, a straight nose, and an expression which was usually impassive. The dormant soul did not peep out of the eyes, however, but the face reflected a deeper feeling, if an indefinite one, as well as a determination to succeed. She surprised herself by sighing.

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Brixton contritely, "I am afraid I must have hurt you."

Helen did not answer at once, for the sigh had been involuntary.

"No," she said, "you did not. I don't know why I sighed."

"I hope, Miss, that you are not ill," said the girl a trifle anxiously.

"I am not ill," answered Helen, looking at the maid's reflection in the mirror, "but I am afraid I could not make you understand."

"Still, Miss," persisted Brixton, "anything I could do—— You do look bad, if I might make so bold as to say."

"Nonsense!" laughed Helen. "I 'm all right, only I 'm trying to reason something out. I suppose I am not exactly worried, but puzzled. Perhaps you could help me."

"I am sure, Miss, I shall be pleased to do what I can."

"Of course, of course," responded Helen quickly, "and the circumstances are perhaps peculiar. You have been a faithful servant—don't misunderstand me—you

can be a good friend. It is strange to me how little I know of you," continued Miss Mainwaring. "You look after my wants and I give orders, but during the time you have been with me I have not tried to know anything of your life, your thoughts, or your ideas. Are you surprised at what I am saying?"

"No, Miss, not at all. In England the conditions are so different. We grow up as servants, our families are in service, and we become a part of those we live with. We are grateful to them, and they in return take an interest in us and our affairs. It makes it more like home for you to speak to me as you are doing, and I thank you for it. A gentleman is often confidential with his man, and why not a mistress with her maid?"

"Brixton," exclaimed Helen abruptly, after a pause, "tell me of your life in England—something about yourself. Why did you leave home, the home you speak of so warmly?"

The girl, thus encouraged, began to speak.

"I left my home near Manchester, when I was seventeen years old. I was in service, but I lived at home. I was well provided for in a good place, and happy, until—a certain day. On that day James Farman and his son had an accident on the high road near our house, and while the repairs were being made to their motor-car they waited in our sitting-room, and I was told to take in tea to them. Up to that time I had been happy, but afterwards, I felt a gradual change come over me. What it was I could not tell, until Jim, the son, began to drop in when he knew I would be alone. He made love to me, and I—hated him. It was because of him I went away."

"Because you did not care for him?" asked Helen.

"Yes. He loved me in his way, but I feel that he did not mean marriage. He was rich, and my people thought

it would be a good match for me. He was plausible and had a winning way, so my parents liked him. They thought he was in earnest, but—I knew better. He would never have married me. I could not have gone with him otherwise. What, Miss, would have become of me if I had given in to him? Perhaps I was a coward, but I ran away. I was cornered like an animal."

"Poor girl," said Helen softly.

"I am sure, Miss, you are good, and I would do anything for you, but I don't understand in what way you need my help."

Helen was silent, and when finally Brixton looked in her mistress' direction, she saw that Helen had changed her position, and was staring dreamily at her reflection in the oval mirror of the dressing table once more. What could be the matter with her young mistress? Something was worrying her, that was certain.

The Mainwaring's house was a corner one, so Helen's bedroom and the little sitting-room connected with it had several windows, two looking out on Fifth Avenue and the others on the side street. The appointments of both rooms were in excellent taste. The bedroom was somewhat severe, but the austere effect of the Sheraton furniture was relieved by a comfortable lounge and several upholstered chairs. The pictures on the walls of her own room were mostly of a religious character, but were placed there more from a sense of beauty than because they showed any especial love of the various subjects. The photographs on the chiffonier were, for the most part, those of friends.

The dressing table, before which Helen was seated, was covered with toilet articles, all in glass and Dutch silver, while the windows hung with curtains of green chintz, in designs of stiff English flowers of pale yellow

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and red, added a touch of color to the coldness of the neutral-tinted walls.

On one side of the sleeping apartment a curtain hung, half hiding the doorway into the sitting-room. There one found oneself in a comfortable study. A desk stood in the space between the two windows, matching the furniture of her bedroom, its brown exterior relieved by gilt lines of Roman design and brass fittings.

From where Brixton was standing she could look beyond Helen to where the half-drawn curtain revealed a glimpse of the sitting-room; then her glance returned to her mistress again.

"It was the green walking-dress——" she began, half apologetically.

"Yes," answered Helen quickly, looking sharply round.

"Then," pursued Brixton, "everything is all ready, Miss. Will you dress now?"

Helen rose slowly and walked to the window, looking out at the traffic of the streets with a slightly puzzled expression before she turned again to her maid, exclaiming impulsively: "There 's something I would like to say, but I don't know how to begin, because I don't think I am capable of telling you how I feel."

Helen suddenly felt herself growing crimson, but she continued to gaze steadily at the girl standing quietly before her, and, feeling confused, felt angry at being so. She strove to regain her composure, and continued to look with her clear gaze at the enigmatical expression on her maid's face. Finally her eyes wavered, and she sighed, and then said absentmindedly, " It might be for money they would want to marry me, but I—— Brixton," continued Helen abruptly, "don't let us talk of this any more. It 's all too confusing. I shall go out;

fetch me my hat—any one will do, my sealskin jacket, and my gloves. There, I'm off. Oh!" said Helen, turning as she reached the door, "I quite forgot to say where I am going. I shall be at the hospital, if any one wants me. I am going out to see Miss Teniel, and, Brixton," she added as she fastened her gloves, "don't think any more of what I said a little while ago."

"Oh! no, Miss, I quite understand."

"I shall be back for tea—probably," remarked Helen, preparing to descend the stairs.

"Very good, Miss, thank you."

Later on, Helen, unconscious of the interest she had aroused in her maid's mind, gazed idly out of the train as it pursued its weary way to the little station of Laurence, where the home was.

VIII

THE train in which Helen was travelling was a slow one. She turned from a survey of a dull stretch of country to the contemplation of her fellow passengers. The change was tentative and unsatisfactory, so she glanced again over the newspaper with its lurid headlines telling of murder and cruelty. A passing phrase of interest held her. She read on, then her aroused attention flagged and the printed sheet fell unheeded to the floor of the car.

The train stopped, and Helen was glad of the interruption. She leaned forward and read the name of the station. She looked at her watch. She had five minutes more. The engine shrieked and puffed. The wheels squeaked; the train moved slowly. A child in arms, disturbed by the noise, raised its voice in protest. The air was close and warm. No windows were raised. The smoke which filled the train made her cough. Others were coughing too. In mute despair she pressed her hot face against the cold pane. Suddenly, she rose and walked slowly towards the door. Her station was in sight. She stood by the still closed door, and as soon as the train began to slow up, opened it. Stepping out, she held on to the hand-rail until the train came to a full stop.

She waited on the platform of the little station, breathing in the fresh air of the country, her face turned towards the departing train; then she moved briskly down the platform. Some one spoke to her. She looked up. It was the agent wishing her good-day. He had advanced from the curt nod to a few gruff words, but

the match stick was still in his mouth. She smiled, and wondered if it was the same bit of wood. Then she walked on more quickly. She was alone.

The bellow of a bull sounded ominously in the distance. Beyond the track a vicious-looking animal, attracted by the dull red of her parasol, made its way steadily towards her. The station agent was nowhere to be seen. She felt she must cry out. Her voice failed. A nameless terror possessed her. She ran madly for a short distance, crossed a low stone wall, and fell panting against a five-barred fence built of stout wood. If she could scale this she was safe. She placed one foot on the lower rail, and seized the top one with her right hand, and clung there, unable to proceed. Her strength was failing her; she was slipping. A warning cry rang out. She was caught as she fell and, passing into unconsciousness, fancied she heard simultaneously the barking of a dog and the sharp report of a gun. When she came to herself a half minute later, she was resting against the fence and, looking up, encountered the eyes of Stephen Carrington regarding her anxiously. Unnerved as she was, the unexpected meeting was an added shock. She still shuddered, but managed to smile faintly.

When at last she had struggled to her feet and was holding with a still trembling hand to one of the rails, she spoke.

"You must have saved my life," she began rather hysterically. "I am very grateful—but how did you happen to be here?"

Stephen thought he detected suspicion in her tone and sighed.

"I did not save your life. I had nothing to do with it. That big collie coming towards us rushed out just at the right moment, and the station agent crippled the bull.

As to how I came here and why—I arrived by the train just now, and my business is at the hospital."

"You came by the train?" exclaimed Helen in surprise, and, as Stephen thought, rather incredulously. "How could I have missed seeing you?"

Stephen mentally interpolated the words, "if you did." What he said aloud was:

"It was hot in the train, and I rushed out into the air almost before we stopped at the station. I saw no one. I made my way quickly along the road. If you did not see me, it was either because you were in a car ahead or because you were looking the other way."

Helen was still rather shaken, and remained silent.

"I did what I could," pursued Stephen. "I only caught you as you fell. I am sorry if I have offended you." There was a faint shade in his low tones, but a feeling of anger at the false position he believed she was forcing him to assume rose within him. Helen, for her part, now wishing to understand his mood, looked up at him as if about to speak. She felt it impossible to do so, however, as he was turned half away from her; so she glanced in the direction of the fallen bull.

She shook out her skirts and adjusted her hat. Carrington had not moved. Why was he acting so strangely? Had she offended him, and how? She could not ask, yet she must speak. The silence was intolerable. It was a pity he was so sensitive, she had not meant to hurt his feelings. She could not apologize, because she had no means of finding out what the cause of her offense was; besides, it would make matters worse. Better say nothing. Was he really angry, or was he hurt by some fancied wrong of which she had innocently been the cause?

"Will you give me my parasol?"

Her words were simple, but he turned abruptly as she spoke and restored it to her.

"I beg your pardon," he said quietly. "I am making a fool of myself."

"On the contrary. Will you walk with me to the home?"

They walked on in silence, which finally Helen broke.

"Tell me about it," she asked. "I had a narrow escape, did I not?"

"Yes," he replied, as she thought brusquely, "you did—but don't speak of it. It was bad enough at the time, but it would be a thousand times worse now."

"Very well," she answered, mystified, yet feeling somewhat subdued by the gravity his tone apparently implied, "you know best."

She understood this new mood about as well as his former one, but felt it more diplomatic to submit.

The walk to the hospital proceeded slowly, for Helen still felt somewhat disturbed, and as Stephen did not contribute much to the conversation she could not divest herself of the feeling that an intangible barrier had risen up between them. She could not decide whether it had been brought about by her agency or not. Glancing sideways at her companion, she noticed the shadow of a frown still resting on his pale and unsympathetic face. She could not understand the man walking thus moodily beside her, nor, indeed, could she understand herself; but the moment of solution was not yet.

Walking beside him thus, she could not help a great wave of pity for the man himself from stealing over her. He was infirm. He was ugly, and doubtless unhappy. His point of view was warped. He fancied that he and his fellow men were at odds, and a personality such as his is difficult to grasp. The majority of people feel that

they cannot easily consider it, and, moreover, they do not take time to do so.

"Stop a moment. I am tired. I believe I was foolish enough to have been shocked more than I thought by that horrid bull."

Stephen, who was a few paces in advance, paused in obedience to her request. They had just entered the grounds of the home. His gaze followed hers; then as she turned from the contemplation of the rural scene, their eyes met and his held hers. He trembled, but Helen, with an imperceptible resistance, finally turned away from him and looked resolutely up towards the hospital. Within the walls of that house she believed she would find the means to fill the void she fancied existed.

Helen smiled with determination when she had reached this conclusion. As she walked on, a sense of elation possessed her.

As they waited for the door to be opened, she turned to Stephen and, with a touch of impulse, said that she hoped they would be going back to town at the same time. The journey was impossible alone. She was usually at home, she went on to say, late in the afternoon. She hoped Mr. Carrington would find time to look in some day. There was usually bridge. Did he know she was learning? One actually had to. It was a great resource. She spoke quickly, feverishly.

Stephen stared at this new Helen in undisguised surprise. What had happened? She was changed in the twinkling of an eye. A new spirit glowed within her. He could not understand.

Maud, who happened to be passing, opened the door for them. Stephen raised his hat and stepped aside.

Helen embraced Miss Teniel.

"Maud," she said, somewhat breathlessly, "I have n't time to say much now. Mr. Lionel Carrington told me I was to be responsible to no one. Don't you feel small? I 'll turn up for a bite later on."

The door leading into the wards opened and closed. Helen disappeared within. Miss Teniel, feeling that she had been looking too long at the sun, blinked mentally. She flashed a question at Stephen. He shrugged his shoulders and turned to hang up his coat and hat.

"My hands are cold. I 'll keep my gloves on," he said.

"Yes," assented Maud vaguely.

"Are you busy? Is Lionel here?"

"No," she answered to the first question, noting the sharp way he jerked the words out. "Yes, Lionel is here."

"Very well. I wish to speak to you. Can we go into your office? What I have to say is private."

"Certainly. What can I do for you?"

She was perplexed by his manner as well as by his words, but she turned into her office. Stephen followed and closed the door. Maud seated herself; she looked at him curiously. He would not sit down, and his manner was tense and unnatural.

Seated at her desk, Maud patiently waited for him to begin. She knew Stephen—she had known him from boyhood, and the angles of his nature, too, she thoroughly understood. Therefore, she waited quietly for him to come to the point. He would do so in his own good time. At last he seated himself.

From time to time he snapped his fingers, as was his custom when especially interested or agitated. His face was pale, the lips compressed; but as the nervous hands grew more composed, the face relaxed and he spoke.

"Maud!" he said slowly, "won't you help me to save her?"

"Save her? From what?" she answered, with a faint stress on the last word. "Tell me how she stands in need of our aid?"

In his words Maud read the appeal of a wounded wood-bird, while he, taking comfort from her mere attitude, breathed more easily. A wave of color passed quickly over his sensitive features. The eyes opened wider, and he impatiently pushed back a lock of hair which had fallen over his forehead.

"I know you will help me."

It was characteristic of Stephen that, instead of shaking hands with her to express his gratitude, he should rise and walk over to the window. Maud smiled indulgently at his action. She watched the misshapen form as he stood looking out with unseeing eyes. She sighed, then with a smile:

"How long have you loved her, Steve?"

The years rolled away as she uttered these words, and the diminutive of his name fell naturally from her lips.

"Ever since I first saw her at the Opera just two months ago," he answered quite simply, and without changing his position. He did not show or apparently feel any surprise at her question. It seemed so natural for him to love Helen.

"You said something about saving her a moment ago. What did you mean by that?"

"I meant what I said," he answered deliberately, "that I wish your help in saving her."

"In saving her?" she echoed. "From whom, may I ask?"

"From my brother!"

Stephen turned away, for a wave of rage shook him, and he felt as if he were suffocating.

Maud looked at him. She sighed. What could she do? He would never listen to reason. She must wait until he was more composed. She rearranged the papers on her desk, and read over one or two letters. She knew without looking that he had moved from the window and was walking slowly in her direction, but she did not look up until he spoke.

"Maud!" he exclaimed, but his doubting mood softened as his strained gaze met the calm eyes looking up into his, "you are going to help me, are n't you?"

"Sit down. Let us talk it over. What can I do?"

"Listen," he replied, drumming impatiently on the arm of the chair upon which he had seated himself at her bidding; "we both know his secret. Could you not tell it to her?"

"Oh, I could n't. I——"

"Yes, I am sure you would if you felt it would be for her happiness. We both love her. We have been friends for so long, and—you will do this for me, won't you?"

Miss Teniel was silent. She reviewed the events which had, during the past month, led up to the present deplorable state of affairs. Her primary impulse was to accede to Stephen's request. Her distrust of Lionel, her contempt of his clumsy efforts at concealment, had caused angry feelings to rise in her. But would it be honorable, would it be fair to blacken the fame of a man who had been her benefactor? She had long since, however, repaid him with interest. He had always been courteous in his own rough way, but she had been taught never to forget that she was but a paid dependent. She had worked her way up from the beginning to what she was now. She was his right hand and important to him, and

he was dependent on her judgment; so she felt reasonably sure of maintaining her position, in any case.

"He is not a fit friend for the woman we are thinking of," Stephen said.

"Surely you are exaggerating." Maud had regained her balance, for his words had recalled her to herself.

"No, I am not," he retorted, "but if you don't believe me, ask some one else. You think I am biassed, because I love her. It is not so. I know very well what I am talking about. There is an intimacy between them. It is growing, but I don't know how he holds her, as I don't believe he has spoken a word of love to her yet."

"If that is true," said Maud, "he is a wise man, for I know Helen. She will not love easily, and she must be allowed to bide her own time. I sometimes wonder if she ever will fall in love. At present, she is in a transition stage, and —she comes here a great deal."

"That 's the way he does it, is it? Well, it 's clever. She talks of work, he of the hospital. The seed is sown. He fosters and tends it to further his own ends. By it he will drag her down, too. Maud! I cannot bear it."

It was a cry of despair. Should she stretch forth her hand to succor him?

"Steve," she begged after a pause, "you believe I am your friend? Very well," she continued, as he nodded, "let me think this over, before I decide. I don't wish to be influenced, and I must do what is right. Let me manage it my own way. Women understand women best."

"That is all that I ask, dear Maud. Let me hear from you when you have come to a decision. I won't wait now."

After the outer door had closed behind him, the matron sat immovable for some time. Stephen might be

overestimating the danger, and, though he had been just in his reading of his brother's character, yet it did not by any means follow that he was right in all. It was not fair to be too much carried away by what he had said. It would be wise for her, in forming her opinion, to be guided by what would be for the happiness of the majority. She loved both Helen and Stephen, and unwillingly admitted that she admired Lionel for his ability.

A gong sounded, and shortly afterwards Maud rose and went in search of Helen. She found her in one of the wards reading to a poor woman who was paralyzed.

"It 's time for luncheon, dear; come, get ready."

"Luncheon!" exclaimed Helen rising and handing her book to one of the nurses. "I had no idea it was so late."

"You look as if you were finding it congenial work," said Maud, as she walked on by Helen's side. "Tell me what you have been doing."

"I have been talking to Mr. Carrington, whose office I passed on my wanderings. He knows so much about this home, and really is wrapped up in his work. He took me all over the place, and then left me to potter about by myself."

"Ah!" said Maud lightly, as she passed into her office, where a light repast laid for two made Helen realize that she was hungry after all. "I am sure you gave many a sufferer much pleasure."

"But it was n't only the wards I went into. I told Mr. Carrington lots of things. He asked me to. We agree on a great many subjects."

"Well," remarked Miss Teniel, as she buttered a piece of thin, crisp toast, "don't overdo it at first, that 's all. I am glad you like being here, but you must not neglect your social duties. You are too attractive to shut yourself off from the world entirely."

"But, Maud, I do not care for the world. Don't laugh at me. I am in earnest about this work."

"My dear, I am not even thinking of laughing at you," replied Maud gravely. "I am very much impressed by the interest you have already shown. My life is devoted to it, and it is so nice to have you here. These are not mere empty words, and I hope we may be of use to each other. I have always wished for a co-worker."

Helen did not answer, so Maud had a good chance of observing the effect of her words; but the answering smile was unconvincing, and Maud could not read her thoughts.

If Helen had been on the alert, she might have read between the lines in Maud's summing up, but she was too intent on her meal to do that.

Later on in the afternoon the matron found herself again cogitating, as from the porch she watched the young girl making her way to the station. A man's deformed figure overtook her just beyond the entrance, and Miss Teniel, recognizing him, sighed for the second time as she turned to go in.

IX

MRS. VAN ALSTYNE always ordered her victoria on the first day that the feeling of spring, as she expressed it, was in the air. For some days in anticipation the old lady would become restless and order her maid to raise and close the window a dozen times. The maid, who was no longer young, mechanically did her mistress's bidding, having played the same comedy for the past twenty years.

"Close the window, Maitland. Do you want me to catch my death?"

Several days passed. One morning, after glancing over a pile of letters which her maid deposited on her bed, Mrs. Van Alstyne said:

"I must have a secretary, Maitland."

"Yes, madam," answered Maitland, smiling. She had heard the same remark so many times before.

"Well, I 'll think about it."

She looked significantly at the window and opened her last letter.

"The window," she said, her eye on the page which she held up to read more carefully.

"The magnolia is out next door——" began Maitland, as she raised the window, but her mistress was too absorbed and did not hear.

"That will do for the present. Can you not feel the spring at last?" exclaimed Mrs. Van Alstyne as she folded her letter carefully. She threw back her head and sniffed at the light breeze, which blew gently in through the open window. "Order the victoria for half past ten."

Being thoroughly methodical, Mrs. Van Alstyne had lived a regular life for many years. Her toilet always took thirty minutes, no more and no less; breakfast twenty minutes, during which she read her morning paper; then, until she went out she was occupied with her correspondence.

"These letters are for the post. I shall not be home for luncheon, but tell Simmons not to forget that we shall be six for dinner," she said, as she stepped into her carriage later on.

"Go to Mrs. Mainwaring's," she added to her coachman, as she settled herself luxuriously among her cushions.

Mrs. Van Alstyne, out of the kindness of her large heart alone, had invited Mrs. Mainwaring to drive with her, because, as she admitted grudgingly, the lady was Helen's mother. The truth was, however, that years ago, when Sidney Mainwaring was a poor bank clerk, and long before he had made his fortune in phenomenally lucky stock transactions, there had been persistent rumors of certain tender passages between himself and the beautiful Theresa Hippisley, as Mrs. Van Alstyne then was; in fact, their world with its invariable faculty for managing every one's business but its own, had already arranged the affair for them. Theresa Van Alstyne sighed gently as she waited for Mrs. Mainwaring to come down and join her.

"Agatha," said Mrs. Van Alstyne, "unless you have something especially attractive to suggest, we shall drive in the park."

"I am in your hands, my dear," answered Mrs. Mainwaring, as she leant back in comfort.

Mrs. Van Alstyne said nothing in reply, but raising her lorgnette cast a disapproving eye on the two buttons

shining on the coachman's back. Her mind, however, was not on the objects in question, for Mrs. Mainwaring's remark had caused her thoughts to drift back to the time when both ladies were at school.

Time, that ordinarily cruel magician, had changed them both very little, except in outward appearance. Even now Mrs. Mainwaring, at that time Agatha Vandorpoel, was timid, retiring, not overly brilliant, but gifted with those beautiful manners which are the result of innate good breeding; but she continued to use invariably endearing epithets, and was affectionate even where it was not reciprocated.

Then, as now, Mrs. Van Alstyne was irritated by the emptiness of the "dear," which in later years developed into "my dear;" and sweet as her nature ordinarily was, she sought to discover some crushing rejoinder which would annihilate the delicate ladylike woman sitting so serenely beside her. Her sense of humor, however, always came to her rescue, for she wisely concluded that if an elephant sat down on a worm the result would be worse than nothing; so she forced a smile and remarked that it was a lovely day for driving.

"Go to the park, Dunham," she added casually to the coachman.

"I confess I prefer driving to walking in these first days of spring," remarked Mrs. Mainwaring with a gentle sigh, "it is so soothing."

"Do you, Agatha? Why is that?"

"I suppose because I feel rather languid at this time of year, and any unnecessary exertion is an effort, which I feel inclined to avoid as much as possible."

Mrs. Van Alstyne glanced momentarily at the high-bred face framed in its handsome setting of gray hair, at the high forehead, the calm gray eyes, the straight

nose with its rather compressed nostrils, the thin lips and the delicately modelled chin, and wondered why this innocent expression of opinion had nettled her. Was it because Agatha's personality was naturally an irritating one? No, because it distinctly was not.

Was it rather because as a girl Agatha had been studious and a prig, continually toadying to the influential girls?

Perhaps that was it, but why allow its consideration to make this drive more of a cross than it necessarily must be? Why, she thought, should it be in any degree a cross, unless she chose to consider it so?

"I wish to consult you about Helen."

Mrs. Van Alstyne came back to the present with a start. The words Mrs. Mainwaring uttered for once did not have an irritating influence, and Mrs. Van Alstyne found herself ready to listen to what the younger woman had to say.

"Helen? What do you wish to say about her? I am very fond of her." And Mrs. Van Alstyne's voice became suddenly tender, while a faint suspicion of pink tinged her cheeks, and her eyes grew bright.

"I don't understand her. She is so different from what I hoped she would be. I wonder what is the matter with her. I wish I knew how she got into such an unnatural state."

"My dear Agatha," Mrs. Van Alstyne murmured, trying to soothe the querulousness which appeared in her companion's words, "why ask the reason for it? If one is ill, one does not ask how one became ill, but one seeks the remedy. Any other means is a waste of time. You must study Helen and try to find the way to lead her back to normal pursuits. In so doing you should avoid

—and I am most serious and positive about this—you must beware of coercing her."

"I admit the truth of what you say, but I don't see my way clear towards putting what is to me a theory to a practical test."

"You think, then," asked Mrs. Van Alstyne, "that there is very little to be done? I mean in deeds."

"Yes," was the quiet answer, "but I wish something would drive all these new-fangled ideas out of her head. Hospitals, distaste for society, and I don't know what other nonsense!" sniffed Mrs. Mainwaring ironically.

"It is a pity to speak of things you don't feel an interest in so disparagingly," said Mrs. Van Alstyne decidedly, "but I wish she would marry some good, clean, upright man, like Ned Findlay, for instance."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Mrs. Mainwaring, with conviction, as if the idea had emanated from her own brain.

"At any rate," said Mrs. Van Alstyne, as the carriage stopped before Mrs. Mainwaring's house on its return from the park, "I should leave her alone. Depend upon it, she, like the proverbial sheep, will come home some day, dragging her tail behind her."

"My dear Theresa," exclaimed Mrs. Mainwaring in a shocked whisper, "Helen is a girl, not a sheep or a monkey."

"Well, I know what I am talking about," was the testy reply. "Good-bye, and come to me whenever you are worried about her," she added magnanimously, as the carriage moved slowly away.

Mrs. Van Alstyne lunched with Mrs. Bramston and did not return until tea-time.

After tea was over, she felt that she had better refresh herself by a nap before dinner, especially as she wished to be brisk for the evening.

A resolution to sleep is often like leading a horse to water; however, as Mrs. Van Alstyne confessed, she felt rested as she looked about her pretty dinner table some two hours later.

Her guests were Miss Mainwaring, Miss Barstow, Mr. Findlay, Lionel Carrington and a young Baron Loto, who was making a tour of the world and had brought letters to her.

"I used to know your mother, baron," she said, "and she was the most beautiful woman I ever saw."

"And she still is, madame," replied the young man, his face brightening as he spoke, "but it is many years since she has been back to this, her native country."

"We will not say how many years, for it was doubtless at that time that I saw her," responded Mrs. Van Alstyne deprecatingly.

"But time has served you well, he has gone by on the other side."

Mrs. Van Alstyne smiled at the rather florid compliment, and looked about at her other guests as the young man turned to Helen on his other side.

How tired Rosamond seemed! Yet she looked up brightly at Lionel, who was next to her. Helen looked very handsome, and was listening attentively to her neighbor. Mrs. Van Alstyne fancied Rose noticed that too, but could not read her expression. How much older Findlay had grown in the last year. He had lost his spirits, and she had heard he was going to live in Chicago permanently. He was listening to Helen as she talked to Loto, and his glance, rather earnest and sad, seemed like the regret of an eternal farewell. She knew he admired Helen. Could it be on her account he was leaving? She had heard that Phil Taylor was also going with him. Poor girl, she was probably totally unconscious of what *she was* doing!

"Is it true, Ned, that you are really leaving us?" Mrs. Van Alstyne asked.

"Yes," he replied, looking down, "next week. Phil is going too, you know. 'It 's easier for a young man to draw up stakes than for an old fellow like me. However, we shall both feel the change."

"Is it really settled?" she asked.

"Oh, quite," he replied firmly, looking up at her for the first time; "I have had a very flattering offer. I would be mad not to accept; I must go, you see." But his glance wandered unconsciously to Helen.

"What 's that?" exclaimed Rose, caustically. "Driven from home? It sounds like the title of a dime novel."

This fillip roused Findlay, and he and Rose plunged into light conversation, laughingly gliding from small talk to semi-serious generalities.

"Americans are more like my own people, madame," said Loto.

"Yes, we are adaptable," replied Mrs. Van Alstyne.

"Surely a woman has power to elevate a man if she cares to?" Helen's voice rang out like a challenge, and Mrs. Van Alstyne could not help listening to hear Lionel's reply. He only laughed. Was there a shade of irony in it, she wondered, as she rose and looked around the table, trying to catch her guests' attention.

"We 'll have coffee in the drawing-room," she said, leading the way thither.

What a motley collection of people she had managed to surround herself with to-night! There was Rose in love with Lionel, Findlay in love with Helen, and Helen —ah! what about her?

"Do not ladies smoke in America?" asked Loto of Rose, at whose side he had seated himself. "In our country all women smoke, except the young unmarried ones."

"A great many women smoke here," answered Rose. "but I am afraid to smoke before Mrs. Van Alstyne; I have an idea she does n't approve of it."

"Not approve of it!" repeated the young man. "How strange! I am so used to it, you see. I find many things different here. I cannot, for instance, get used to the hurry and bustle. I like our way best. Then, all men work here; why, I find no one in the club before the afternoon."

"Yes, that must seem odd to you," she answered. "Are you a bridge player?"

"I love it. I play a great deal."

"Bridge?" cried the hostess. "Who is ready to play? Come, Helen, Findlay, and you, baron. The table is in the library."

Carrington and Miss Barstow were left to amuse each other.

"What 's the matter, Rose? You 're in a brown study."

"Am I?" she replied. "What makes you think there 's anything wrong?"

"You seem so quiet. You hardly said a word to me during dinner. I had a nice time between the devil and the deep sea. The old lady never opened her lips to me."

"Lionel, you 're not treating me like a friend. Remember our agreement. You know," she continued earnestly, opening and shutting her fan convulsively, "I would do anything for you. Don't you know that by this time? Lionel, don't be cruel."

"Don't be foolish, Rose. You 're a good chap, I know, and I 'm very fond of you."

"I wonder if you are. I often do. If you were in

trouble, I 'd stand by you, for I am just a good staunch friend."

"By Jove! I 'll remember that. Rose, you don't mind. I really must be off. You can cut in there, you know."

"You are going? Why, what will Mrs. Van think?"

"I 've got to leave. I have—an engagement."

Rosamond did not take his proffered hand. Instead, she got up slowly and walked away. Then she turned for a moment.

"I can't shake hands. I 'll just say good-night. Don't follow me. I 'll make your excuses."

She left the room. Lionel stood for a moment, gnawing his moustache; then, with a muttered curse, he turned and walked away. The front door slammed. He was gone.

Helen looked up as Rose entered the library alone. Her expression changed. She was uneasy. The game went on. Rose seated herself by Mrs. Van Alstyne, who was playing dummy.

"Lionel had a headache. I told him to go. I said I would make his excuses."

The words were uttered in a low voice, but the peculiar stress Rose always laid on her consonants made each word audible to all. Helen hesitated, then stopped. She looked at the cards on the table.

"I am playing very badly. I am sorry, baron." She felt ill at ease and hoped no one had noticed it.

Loto shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Are your hands cold? Ah, then you will win. It is an old superstition."

"Yes, they are cold." Helen looked up quickly. Rose's narrowed eyes met hers and she flushed slightly, but went on with the game.

The rubber was at an end. Helen and Loto had lost. She rose.

"Console yourself, mademoiselle. Unlucky at cards—but you know the rest."

Helen did not answer. She shook hands with Mrs. Van Alstyne, saying, "I don't suppose you will ever ask me to play again! Oh, that queen! I am sure I shall dream of her." She bade Miss Barstow good-night and bowed formally to Loto.

"I will see Miss Mainwaring to her carriage," Findlay said. "Don't ring, please."

There was something indefinite perhaps which Mrs. Van Alstyne read in Findlay's tone, that prevented her from rising. The two left the room. Loto showed the ladies a new card trick.

"This is good-bye, you know." Ned tried in vain to keep his voice steady. They had almost reached the door of the drawing-room. "I see that it could never have been. God bless you, Helen."

"Good-bye, Mr. Findlay. I really am sorry, but you see, I did not love you."

There was a faint rustle of silk, then when he looked up, she had disappeared. He waited until the front door had opened and closed, then returned to the library.

"Shall we cut for deal?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Van Alstyne, drawing an ace. "Ned, it 's you and I again."

"Yes," he said, "I hope we 'll have the same luck."

"And I expect to be able to prove the truth of the baron's quotation—or its converse, rather. I have been unlucky in love," said Rose, and her green eyes smiled maliciously. But the hostess was sorting her cards, and it was Loto alone who looked up and smiled back at her.

X

HELEN was deep in the calculation of her personal accounts, which she found some difficulty in balancing. She took up her bank book and consulted it. Two hundred and sixty-nine dollars and thirteen cents, was what she read, clearly and methodically written in a well-formed hand. The interest of one dollar and ten cents had been added, but even with this her check-book was three cents out. Well, Maud, who was coming to lunch, could probably explain it. She glanced at the clock. Five minutes to one. She would go down. Her mother was lunching out, but Maud would soon be here. She took up several letters she had written and left the room, intending to give them herself to the postman. The bell rang as she reached the hall. It was he; she gave him the letters, and just as she was closing the door, a voice called from outside: "Let me in. It is I—Maud."

"Why, you are quite breathless!"

"Yes," assented Maud; "I am. I ran so as to try and get here before you could shut me out."

Helen laughed lightly and rang the bell.

"I hope you are ready for luncheon," she said. "I am famished."

The butler appeared, announced luncheon, and they went in.

"Helen, my dear," exclaimed Maud, as she finished her cup of consommé, "you have no idea what excitement it is for me to come to town. I am like an Irish cook on her day out," she added when the butler had left the room. "You see I have all my regalia on, too."

"Yes, I see," said Helen. "What is the meaning of that?"

"Well, for one reason, because I am lunching with you, and I am sure you did n't expect me to come in my uniform. The other is that I am going to have tea with Mrs. Bleeckvelt."

"Two very good reasons," laughed Helen, helping herself to the next course. "I am going to Mrs. Bleeckvelt's, too. It 's her day, and I owe her a dinner call."

"I don't owe her anything, but she was good enough to write and particularly ask me to come. She is going to have some one to sing and some one to play."

"That will be nice," said Helen. "I have heard so little music outside the opera this year. Going out takes up so much of one's time, and then my work at the hospital has really become very absorbing."

"Yes, you have been very good about coming," said Maud drily.

"My dear Maud, I love it! You speak as if it must be a drudgery to me, but it is not. Do tell me," continued Helen, "if the men have finished whitewashing the cellar, and how it looks."

"It looks very well so far, though of course it is n't entirely finished. But, my dear, please don't talk shop. Remember, it 's my holiday."

"Very well, but, Maud, Mr. Carrington told me——"

"Now that is shop too. Wait till lunch is over, at least. I must be allowed to enjoy this fascinating salad. What is it made of?"

"I have n't the remotest idea, but it is good, is n't it? I will wait, but there are some shop things I must talk over with you before you go."

Maud acquiesced, as this arrangement entirely fitted in with her plan of action. She had invited herself to

lunch with a purpose. She wished to speak to Helen very seriously. The absence of Mrs. Mainwaring did not alter details, there were always the servants to be considered. Maud had planned to wait until after coffee had been served and then, under some pretext or other, to manage to have Helen propose that they go up to her morning-room. It would be easier to talk there than here, for there were too many portières and no doors on this floor. Maud knew just the conditions she needed, and just the stage-setting essential. The little room upstairs was an ideal place for private conversation. So much depended on environment if any degree of success was to be obtained.

Ever since the day of Stephen's confidence, Maud had studied Helen, analyzed her actions, and sought to find out what was in the girl's mind. As far as Maud had been able to make out, Helen was very much engrossed with her work at the home. The young girl apparently lost sight of the fact that this brought her in close touch with the head of the institution, Mr. Lionel Carrington. It seemed to Maud that the time had come to speak out plainly. Of course Helen was innocent of any complicity—it would be absurd to think otherwise—but she was drifting rather too quickly with the current. Helen, as yet on the mere edge, was in danger of being carried on, her eyes closed to the danger, with only Work at the helm to guide her from harm. But Work was old and blind, too, except where Routine led. Experience did not shine out like a beacon light to make clear the path of duty. Maud, who perceived what loomed threatening in the way, felt herself called upon to speak.

"My dear," Maud exclaimed, looking at Helen and laughing, "I am stuffed, simply stuffed."

"Don't despair; coffee comes next and that is supposed

to be good for the digestion," answered Helen laughing, too. "Let 's have it up-stairs. Send coffee to my morning-room, Briggs."

"That was an excellent suggestion of yours, Helen," said Maud innocently, as they ascended the stairs. "It is so much more cosy in your little room, and less formal than down-stairs."

"Well, I 'm not so selfish as I seem," announced Helen, as she threw open the door of her room. "I lured you here for a purpose."

"Indeed?" asked Maud blandly, "that sounds rather dramatic. Well, what is your purpose?"

"You say that as if you had one, too," suggested Helen, looking curiously at her friend, who had seated herself in a comfortable chair.

"Perhaps I have," answered Maud lightly, "but you had better have the first innings. Mine can keep. Come! What do you want me to do? First, my dear, could you —have you such a thing as a cigarette?"

Maud looked over the check and bank books Helen handed her, and puffed away in silence for a few minutes. "Why, here! Look! Five from five leaves nothing. You must have taken it for an eight instead of a five."

"Maud, you are a dear. I 'm ever so much obliged to you. Now, before you begin your *purpose,* can I just talk to you for a minute?"

Miss Teniel looked at the lovely face before she replied. In it she read a variety of emotions, but she knew that the direct, rather earnest look spelt innocence.

"Of course, dear, what is it?" Her interest was but half aroused, and she uttered the above words somewhat absently. As a matter of fact, her mind was more than half occupied with the question as to how and when she

should speak out her heart to Helen. The opportunity must come naturally.

She listened to what Helen had to say, and heard the list of things she had done. "Mr. Carrington thinks as I do," was the frequent iteration. But Helen wished to know what Maud's ideas were. Maud paid only half as much attention as she should have, but she managed to grasp the import of what was being said, though the punctuation of the sentences by the word "Carrington" irritated her more and more. She tossed her cigarette impatiently into the fireplace and looked up at Helen inquiringly.

"I don't believe you 've been listening to anything I 've been saying," began Helen peevishly.

"Don't you think that is a trifle unjust?" asked Miss Teniel. "You were telling me about the things you have done, and I feel you have shown excellent judgment. About the other things you are going to do, or rather intend doing, I really cannot express my opinion. They are rather radical—too much so to be dismissed summarily."

"Then, why are you so indifferent?" objected Helen. "I thought you took such an interest in the home."

"I should think you would know how much the home means to me, without making unfair insinuations of that kind."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Helen scornfully. "Now don't be theatrical."

"You will think I am prejudiced, so I had better say nothing more," interposed Maud, somewhat stiffly; then she continued more earnestly: "You know, dear, that I am your friend, and——"

"And what?" inquired Helen.

"And," continued Maud firmly, "I cannot bear to

think of you throwing yourself away, as you are evidently bound to do in the end, unless——"

"Unless I listen to you, I suppose you mean," said Helen, laughing ironically. "A second Daniel come to judgment!"

"Helen Mainwaring, listen to me. You have spoken more than once of Lionel Carrington in a way that I cannot tolerate. I have known him for fifteen years, and I know what he is. You are beginning to fall under his influence, and I care too much for you to allow this to go on without telling you all."

"Go on," said Helen unsteadily.

"He is utterly unprincipled, without the faintest conception of morality. He is a thief, for he steals a woman's honor with as little compunction as would a common felon money or jewels."

Maud spoke quietly, and did not raise her voice. Helen, on the other hand, leaned forward excitedly, with an angry frown on her flushed face.

"You are wrong!" she cried, putting her hand for a moment to her throat, for she felt as if she were suffocating. "A man of so much ability and courage can only be a man of honor."

"That 's a very pretty and loyal sentiment, but I fear somewhat wide of the truth."

"Maud," said Helen tensely, "you have no right to say such things. You are taking away his character, without giving him a chance to defend himself. He is coming to see me late this afternoon, and I shall speak to him then."

"You have written to him?"

"Yes," answered Helen, "he wrote to me, asking if he might come. He wished to see me very particularly."

"And that was one of the notes you posted as I came?"

Helen answered in the affirmative.

"If I had only known!" muttered Maud.

"Ask him," she said aloud, "who was the father of the child who died at the home some time ago, and if he remembers a woman named——"

"Stop!" cried Helen. "I won't listen. He must clear himself."

"Helen," said Maud, rising after a moment's hesitancy and taking a few tentative steps in her friend's direction, "must we quarrel over this? Ah, can it be possible that you already love him?"

"It takes a good deal to make old friends fall out," Helen answered reflectively, "but you have spoken very frankly and plainly. I will be certain how I stand after I have seen Mr. Carrington. Frankly, I do not love him, but I admire and respect him. He has been kindness itself to me."

Maud sighed as she turned aside, for she realized that Helen would not yield further. Her words had not been hard, but her actions had not that conciliatory tendency which leads toward sympathy. There was no advance and no softness. Helen certainly possessed firmness and obstinacy of character, which made Maud slightly afraid for her. Miss Teniel had no qualms or doubts as to how the coming interview between Helen and Lionel would end. Helen would surely turn to her again when it was all over, but it was quite on the cards that she might say nothing further on the subject. A storm had to come, but it should clear the atmosphere.

At this point she rose and informed Helen that she had some shopping to do, and hoped she would see her later at the "tea."

Helen rang the bell sharply.

"You will excuse me from coming down," she said,

without looking at Maud. "Brixton will get your wraps for you. I am tired. Good-bye."

As soon as the door closed, Helen walked to the window and looked gloomily out; then she pushed the heavy curtain aside and entered her own room.

She sat there for some time, her thoughts in a confused whirl. The sharp striking of the clock on the mantelpiece roused her, and she rose and rang the bell.

When her maid came, she told her to order the brougham at half-past four, then to come back and she would dress to go out.

Up to the moment she left the house, Helen was undecided as to whether she should go to Mrs. Bleeckvelt's or not. Second thoughts convinced her that she ought to go. She would stay only a short time, then go to the park and take a walk there. The air would surely clear these cobwebs from her brain. The rapid drive, a refreshing cup of tea, and the brisk walk brought her back to the house at ten minutes past six, refreshed, but dreading the coming interview. She dismissed the carriage and mounted the steps slowly. As she entered the house the butler told her a visitor was waiting in the drawing-room.

Helen Mainwaring was a woman of breeding, and her innate courage stood her in a good stead. She paused perhaps half a minute, and then walked calmly into the room, greeting Mr. Carrington with self-possession.

He, who prided himself on his indifference to emotion, could not restrain a feeling of admiration from arising at her appearance.

Helen seated herself, and motioned him to do the same. Whatever opening he would make he must find for himself, for she would give him no help. She would listen, of course, to what he had to say, and reserve judgment. If, on the other hand, he should try to defend

himself by quibbling, it would be time for her to assert herself and demand an explanation.

"You will have wondered," began Lionel, "what it is which has brought me here to-day."

He paused and raised his eyes appealingly to hers. She looked up and met his gaze, but did not speak.

"I do not wish to be selfish, but I think it only fair to myself and to you to tell you——"

There was a break in the thread of his discourse, but he soon continued to speak.

"My life has been a varied one. Once love crossed my path, and scorched me, but the scar has healed, leaving no trace."

"You cannot understand my point of view," he continued, more quickly. "You cannot grasp my thought. I know that all that is false, all that is underhand, you despise. I have known you only for a short time, but I have already learned that; so I beg you to believe I am not concealing anything from you, and that I am honest when I say that I wish you had come into my life sooner."

Helen had not ceased to look at Lionel. Every word he uttered she heard with attention; some of them wounded.

"Perhaps my life has not been exemplary," he went on, "but you see I had no ideals; and then I was unlucky in having no one to guide me."

Helen tried hard to remain nonpartisan, but found it a hard task. He had spoken too crudely for her to feel anything more than that he was making an exceedingly weak plea. She looked away for a moment, but as he began to speak she met his glance with more trepidation, for she saw a strange light in his eyes and a lack of balance that was unusual to him.

"Can you not guess what I wish to say? Do you not know that I love you, that I need you? Do not tell me that I have made a mistake, that you do not——"

He stopped suddenly, for there was something in Helen's manner which checked him.

"No, I do not love you. I have no desire to take the place of that woman I saw dead in the hospital. You cannot deny who she was or that——"

"It 's a lie!" he retorted tensely.

"Indeed? Then, why are you so angry?"

"What proof have you?" he asked coldly, ignoring her question.

"The resemblance of the child to you, which I am told was too strong to be a mere coincidence, and your manner. It is conclusive to me. No, I cannot be your wife," she repeated firmly.

"My wife!" he laughed brutally, goaded to frenzy by her truthful reading of his character. "You mistake me. I do *not* believe in marriage."

Helen recoiled as if she had been stung by some poisonous reptile.

"You have insulted me!" she cried. "Leave the house!"

She rang the bell, and when the servant appeared she said quietly, without again looking at Lionel, "Mr. Carrington is going," and then she turned aside.

She heard the door close, waited until the servant had left, then made her way out of the room and up the staircase like one suddenly bereft of reason.

XI

MAUD is a friend of Helen's; Helen is, I am afraid, a friend of Lionel Carrington's. Maud is the connecting link, and I must see her this afternoon."

Mrs. Van Alstyne was on her way homeward. Suddenly, she called to her coachman to stop.

"Go to Maxwell's, in Fiftieth Street. I wish to telephone."

Having communicated with Maud and learned that she would be free between three and four o'clock, Mrs. Van Alstyne drove to the station. She could catch the two-forty-three and return in the four-forty-seven, so Miss Teniel had said, and that would make her a trifle late for Mrs. Gaspey's tea. She would have to return home, dress, and go out again. These considerations, however, had very little effect on her decision, for it was much more important to go and see Maud.

So as a friend of Helen's, whom she loved as her own flesh and blood, she felt that it was her duty to act in her behalf.

Absorbed by this idea, Mrs. Van Alstyne found she had arrived at the Grand Central Station.

The order had been given to return at five-fifteen and wait, the carriage had driven away, and Mrs. Van Alstyne leisurely took her place in the train. On arriving at Laurence, she found Miss Teniel waiting to meet her.

"I brought this antiquated station wagon," said Maud, as she shook hands with her guest, "because I know you hate walking, even for a short distance."

"I do. You are quite right," answered Mrs. Van Alstyne, as she stepped into the shaky vehicle and seated herself; "yet I believe lots of the smartest women in town walk every morning. I 'm told it is considered good for the complexion."

"I shouldn't think many of the women I saw the other day in town needed much added to their complexions," said Maud smiling.

"No, my dear, they don't, or they would be overweighted."

Mrs. Van Alstyne was the sole representative of one of the really old New York families, a cousin of Mrs. Bleeckvelt's, and also the widow of Amory Van Alstyne, a well-known banker of long ago, as well as being related to the Richlocks, of whom there were no smarter or more representative people existent; so her sharp sayings were smiled at tolerantly. She had consistently refused to be pushed aside by the host of new-comers who had invaded the social metropolis during the past ten years; and, being possessed of an ample fortune, entertained delightfully, managing by her wit and cleverness to keep herself very much in evidence.

"My dear," she exclaimed, "how charming it is here!" They were already in the grounds of the home, and Mrs. Van Alstyne looked about her, smiling complacently.

She did not wish to broach the subject which was nearest her heart just yet, and did not do so until they were comfortably settled in Maud's own room.

"You are sure the door is closed?" she asked, somewhat anxiously; "I have come out to have a very confidential talk with you, and I don't wish to be overheard."

"No one will disturb us here," answered Miss Teniel reassuringly, "for when I am in my own room I do not

allow any one to interrupt me, unless it is a matter of life and death."

"It is because I am so fond of Helen that I must speak, for her poor mother, who is more or less of a figure-head, is, I am sure, not in sympathy with the girl. That is why I come to you instead of her. Maud, is that a folding bed over there? Really? I should be deadly afraid to sleep in one. You are very comfortably settled here, though. But what should be done about Helen? I am afraid she is a good deal attracted by—are you sure there is no one listening? Well—by Lionel Carrington. Of course you have noticed it?"

"Yes, I have," agreed Maud; "I spoke to her about it seriously."

"How did she take it?" asked Mrs. Van Alstyne excitedly.

"As I thought she would," was the answer; "very badly."

"He is a thoroughly bad man, and I could not bear to have a girl I am fond of interested in him."

"You are quite right," said Maud decidedly; "I know him well, and he is a man who has not a shred of respect for any woman. I can tell you that——"

"Ah," interrupted Mrs. Van Alstyne, "I hoped you could! You see, I am not at all secretive or diplomatic, but I have always had a feeling that Mr. Carrington was decidedly crooked. But tell me more about Helen before you continue with the list of your superintendent's lapses."

"Helen?" inquired Maud gently; "I must say I am sorry for her. I feel confident it will all come right in the end, though, as I said, she did not take my words kindly. Why should she? You know she comes here a great deal, and naturally sees a great deal of Mr. Car-

rington. It is an intimacy which grows apace, though I don't think Helen herself realizes how quickly it has progressed. I thought it wiser not to interfere until the last moment."

"The last moment? What do you mean by that?" asked Mrs. Van Alstyne suspiciously.

"Well, when my instinct told me that matters were coming to a head, I went to lunch with her and talked it over. As it happened, I found it was quite time for some one to take a hand."

"Go on!" cried the older woman. "I am sure it was very courageous and I admire you for doing it. But I gather that your efforts did not meet with much success. Why?"

"I can answer your question," answered Miss Teniel, leaning forward to tie her shoe. "In the course of our conversation she informed me that he had written to her, and was coming to see her about a very important matter late that afternoon. She gave me to understand that she could not believe accusations of such a serious nature until she had talked with him. He must have a chance to clear himself. Those were her very words."

"She must be already in love with him to talk so," murmured Mrs. Van Alstyne, "but I wish I knew what took place between them."

"I have not seen her since, but I have seen him," answered Maud mysteriously, "and if appearances count for anything, I think I can tell you very nearly what happened."

"You can?" exclaimed the other, leaning forward and showing the greatest interest in her companion's words. "Do go on. I almost forget at times that Helen, for whom we both care so much, is involved. It is like the plot of a play, but let me hear more."

"I had heard it said he was a drinking man, though I had never seen evidences of it before; but the day after I had seen Helen he turned up here apparently drunk. He has always taken so much interest in the home, and has always been quite straight when at work here; but that day, as I have said, there was not the slightest doubt in my mind as to his condition."

"Yes?" queried Mrs. Van Alstyne impatiently, as Miss Teniel paused.

"You may imagine I managed to see as little as possible of him," pursued Maud, "and that was not difficult, for he went almost at once to his office. Time passed, and as soon as I had finished lunch I determined to investigate. Accordingly I went to his office and quietly pushed open the door. I looked in, to find him seated in front of his desk, half turned away from it. He was in his shirt sleeves, and his coat had been thrown in a heap on the floor. I felt there might be something wrong and drew nearer. One hand was clenched and stretched out on the desk; his body had fallen to one side so that he lay huddled there, with his head resting on his arm. The other arm hung loosely over the side of the chair. I thought he was dead, but his stertorous breathing soon reassured me. I noticed that the cuff on the arm which hung limp was unfastened. The link had not been secured and the sleeve was rolled up a trifle. Even without an examination which revealed a number of punctures, the hypodermic syringe half concealed in his other hand would have told me immediately that I was in the presence of a morphine fiend. He was ghastly, with deep rings under his closed eyes. I thought his heart action might be weak, which proved to be the case, but from the character of the beats I did not consider it advisable to administer a stimulant. Accordingly, I

went in search of Jones, one of the orderlies, and together we lifted him to a couch, covering him up carefully. I had previously buttoned his cuff and concealed the syringe, as I did not wish any one to know the truth."

"Horrible! Oh, how terrible!" cried her companion, in shocked accents.

"Yes, was n't it," agreed Miss Teniel, "when you consider that he was superintendent of the hospital I am matron of? The physical reaction was merely a matter of routine. That interested me."

"You are a strange girl! I should have fainted," remarked Mrs. Van Alstyne with conviction.

"Oh, no, you would n't, if you were as accustomed to hospital work as I," answered Miss Teniel smiling. "But," she went on more seriously, "I have something more to tell you, and, as we are speaking frankly and confidentially, I see no reason why you should not know of it. I told Helen, because I thought it my duty."

Maud related faithfully the visit she had made to the private room where the woman and her child lay dead. She told Mrs. Van Alstyne, too, of the subsequent interview with Lionel, and how his manner had only served to strengthen her suspicions.

Mrs. Van Alstyne gasped.

"He is worse than I thought. You were right in your estimation of him. But, Maud," she continued earnestly, "I must ask whether you think any harm could come to Helen?"

"None, whatever," was the decided answer.

"Then," concluded the other rising, "I am sure we have nothing to fear for her, but I do wish she would fall in love and marry."

"I wonder," mused Maud reflectively, "if she ever

will. She thinks that work can take the place of love, which is impossible, unless love is dead."

"You are very philosophical."

"You speak as if that quality were a rare one," rejoined Miss Teniel, who was still seated watching Mrs. Van Alstyne as she pottered about the room.

"Maud, I like your room immensely," remarked her guest, with sweeping irrelevance, "all except that bed. It frightens me to look at it. Everything else is solid and practical—but in excellent taste. Do you know, it quite reminds me of you, dear."

"My dear friend!" cried Maud laughing. "Don't you know that solid suggests fat, practical makes one think of worthiness—but I suppose you are trying to soften the sting by adding the last part of your sentence."

"I should like to shake you when you say such things——"

"And I know why," broke in Maud, "because they are true and you are vexed at being found out. My dear Mrs. Van—I believe I am the only one who calls you that to your face——"

"Maud, tell me the truth!" exclaimed the older woman, her voice trembling slightly, "is that what I am really called?"

"Oh, yes," answered Miss Teniel, in a matter-of-fact tone; "that is your social *nom de guerre.*"

"All I can be thankful for," remarked Mrs. Van Alstyne resignedly, "is that they don't call me 'mother Van' or 'the old lady,' but I suppose that will come in time. To return to Helen, though," she went on, with that delightfully vague and sudden change of subject which was one of her most marked characteristics, "I

think with you she is in a very interesting stage of development."

"One thing which annoys me about her," she continued, pausing to admire the ivory toilet articles on Maud's dressing-table, "is her innate obstinacy. She is quite capable of following the man up just as a matter of duty."

"There you are wrong," said Maud decisively, "and you are not fair to her. Helen likes or dislikes. There are no half measures about her. She has a high sense of honor, but she could never carry it to ridiculous lengths, I am sure."

"It 's a fine thing to be loyal," remarked Mrs. Van Alstyne, half turning and looking at Maud, "and I honestly admire your defence of your friend. It is hard to know one's friends nowadays," she concluded dryly.

"Or oneself," added Miss Teniel, imitating her tone mischievously.

"Which brings us back to Helen," continued Mrs. Van Alstyne complacently. "What do you think had better be done?"

"I know what I am going to do," answered Miss Teniel, rising. "I am going to continue to be her friend. It takes a good deal to break up a friendship, which she admitted herself. We can do more for her in that way than by talking ourselves black and blue. Actions speak louder than words, you know."

"Yes, I know," rejoined Mrs. Van Alstyne fretfully, "but it is such a relief to talk, even if you are only talking *at* a person. Action is all very well, but it is so passive. I mean," she added quickly in explanation, "I feel as if I were accomplishing so much more when I am talking, than when I am just doing things. Your phrase sounds like a copy-book, and yet I suppose copy-

books have their uses, even if we don't always agree with their sentiments."

"Ah, dear Mrs. Van, you have a large heart, and I know you don't mean seriously what you say——" began Maud.

"I always mean what I say," was the quick rejoinder, "and I love that green vase on the mantel-piece."

Miss Teniel, used as she was to the sudden variations of mood in the other, laughed at the swift change of subject.

"What became of Lionel?" asked Mrs. Van Alstyne.

"He went home subsequently, and I have not seen him for two days."

"Humph! and it is doubtful whether you will see him for some time to come."

Mrs. Van Alstyne answered the challenge she thought she read in Maud's expression, and remarked that she was sure he would come to a bad end.

As this was an unanswerable proposition, Miss Teniel said nothing, for she was unwilling to begin an argument which could only be futile and one-sided.

"This has been a very instructive conversation; but really," concluded Mrs. Van Alstyne, looking at her watch anxiously, "it is long after four and I must be going. After you have ordered the carriage, perhaps there would be time to give me a bird's-eye glimpse of the home."

When Maud returned from the station after seeing her guest off, she sat down to a lonely cup of tea in her office. Her thoughts were full of the conversation which had taken place a short time ago. Helen was, after all, a woman—and a woman's conduct is often ruled by instinct. Helen could not be in love with such a man! The very idea was preposterous. Young, and moreover

inexperienced, she could not understand the exigencies of a *grande passion.*

Maud's expression was sad and weary as she rose, closed the door, and seated herself again. Her hands were clasped listlessly, and hung of their own weight before her. She raised her head, and looking up ruminated idly; but her thoughts returned to Lionel. Her expression became cynical, but a look of triumph finally shone from the eyes which had previously been veiled with sadness, as she murmured softly and triumphantly the words of the poet: "The mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small."

XII

MRS. MAINWARING had chosen the evening of the 5th for her reception. She had not given a "tea" for her daughter, preferring to give instead one large entertainment with music later on. Several members of the Metropolitan Opera Company were to sing, an elaborate supper would follow, and informal dancing would close the evening's entertainment.

The guests on the evening in question, after greeting the hostess and her daughter, made their way into the next room, each anxious to secure a good seat.

When the rooms were comfortably filled—Mrs. Mainwaring had invited only seventy people—the butler announced that the artists were waiting in the library, and that most of the guests had arrived; so Mrs. Mainwaring, with Helen and several men following, went into the other room, where shortly afterwards the music began.

"Who did the room, Chester?" asked Mrs. Peters of Chester Carr. "It 's very effective."

"Floyd Dearing. You remember that room at our house?"

"Yes, I do," and the lady threw back her head and laughed as she met his eye.

"Hush!" begged Chester whispering. "Some one will hear you."

Loud applause greeted the end of the song, which the artist acknowledged with graceful bows.

"Go over and ask Fanny Scott where she got that thing she has in her hair. It looks like one of mine."

"I won't do any such thing Lena," he answered, looking straight before him.

"You never do anything I ask you," she retorted coldly. "Why do you stay here? I didn't ask you to come."

"I think Letitia is the best dressed woman in New York," put in Mrs. Fitzgerald, who was seated next to them.

"I see what you are up to," Carr answered, bending forward and looking straight at her, "you are trying to soften Lena's uncouth speeches by praising my wife."

Mrs. Fitzgerald looked slightly nervous. Why did not Gadski begin? She was to sing the "Nussbaum," and Mrs. Fitzgerald wondered what was causing the delay.

In another part of the room, Mrs. Mainwaring, who had been enjoying herself thoroughly during the evening, now turned and looked anxiously about her. Caruso was singing his last song, and people were beginning to wear that peculiar expression which betokens that they are in need of a change.

Mrs. Mainwaring caught the eye of the butler, and had him signal to the special orchestra, which was to play during supper, to begin. With Mr. Van Rensselaer Grayson she led the way to the library, which had been converted into a temporary supper room, with numerous small tables dotted here and there, and with the hostess's table in the middle.

"It looks like a hen and chickens," was Mrs. Peters' comment, as she seated herself at Carr's side at the centre table.

Helen was engaged in conversation with a rather serious young man. She found him interesting, and he was thoroughly enjoying himself. His personality sometimes dominated hers; but he found her no mean antagonist,

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while his wit matched itself again and again with hers and received a fillip, which fired him with enthusiasm.

"Divorce!" whispered Helen to her companion, "that is a very dangerous subject at the present day. I have heard that it is impossible to throw a stone now without hitting a divorcée."

"Then hit them, I say!" exclaimed he vehemently.

"But what can be done?" asked Helen. "A great many suggestions have been made, a number of conferences held, and leading jurists have expressed their opinions very strongly, but——"

"Nothing can be accomplished until the matter is taken up seriously. It is proposed that proceedings in divorce shall be made public, but I think the best thing for the lawyers to do will be to attempt to bring about legislation tending to prevent the re-marriage of divorced persons."

"Do you mean all, when you say divorced persons?" asked Helen cynically. "Ah, I thought not; and that is the weak point in your argument. Make it impossible absolutely for any and all divorced persons to marry again during the life of the former husband or wife, and you strike at the root of the evil. It would not be any hardship, except where the man or woman who is in the wrong wishes to gloss over the situation by forming a new alliance, and the very one which all laws of order and morality should prohibit."

"Would not such a state of affairs be something like the millennium?" he asked earnestly.

"Yes, but as it is a question which is a great deal before the public mind now," remarked Helen, sipping her champagne reflectively, "I feel that after it has had a thorough airing, the overwhelming weight of public opinion will force a solution of the problem."

Sayres looked at her and nodded sagely.

"You are right. There is a great wave of honesty starting up and making itself felt in many conditions of life. You, however, do not recognize the marriage of divorced persons while their former husbands or wives are alive, I gather?"

"In theory, no; but in practice I am forced to do so."

"Who is begging the question now?" he asked laughingly.

Helen laughed too, seeing that she had the worst of it.

"You are terrible men, you lawyers! We poor women never have the remotest chance against you. I predict great success for you. I believe you will go far. Look! mother has risen, so I suppose we must move. But you will come back here to smoke after you have taken me to the drawing-room—and tell the other men to do so, too."

The first person Helen noticed as her escort left her was Miss Barstow. She looked pale and worried, and was talking to Mrs. Mainwaring. Shortly afterwards Rose left the room alone.

"What is the matter, mother?" asked Helen, with concern. "Is Rose ill? Can I do anything?"

"She is not ill, but her poor mother has just had a paralytic stroke. Rose is very much worried, as her mother has not been in the best of health for some time. Yes, go and see what you can do for her, there is a good girl."

"Why did they tell her here? How did she hear? By telephone? What a fearful shock!" said Mrs. Van Alstyne, as Helen went in search of Rose. She found her in the dressing-room, trembling and pale.

"Oh, I know she is going to die!" was all she could say.

Helen did not make any attempt at consolation, but

quietly helped, and when she was ready put her arm about her and took her down a side staircase to her carriage. She stood at the door and watched anxiously until the horses started.

As she reached the hall again she heard the lilting measures of dance music beginning. What a lurid contrast!

When finally the last guest had departed, Mrs. Mainwaring laid her hand on Helen's shoulder and said:

"It 's been most successful, but I am tired. Did n't you have a good time? You were very much admired, but you look pale."

Helen gave some conventional answer and offered her arm to her mother. At her door, they kissed and parted. Helen, too, was very tired.

"It cost a good deal—the party I mean. I am glad it is over, though," Helen said, yawning, as she turned to the staircase. Poor Rose! she thought, as she went up to her room.

XIII

PARIS. And, what is more or less problematic, Paris in the first week of May! The month of flowers is one of the uncertain moods of the city of light, and, like a pretty woman, is capable of weeping for no especial reason, or of wreathing its face in smiles. The Avenue du Bois de Boulogne this morning was bathed in golden sunlight, but Rose Barstow, seated on one of the iron chairs, with the light glimmering through the leafy branches above, did not seem in the humor to appreciate the beauty of the scene. She was dressed in the deepest mourning, for her mother had never recovered from her sudden seizure, but had died some ten days later. It had been a great shock to poor Rosamond, and she had come abroad as soon as the necessary business had been attended to, seeking by change of scene to distract her mind from the weariness and depression the last few weeks had brought. She wanted to be alone, so, despite the protestations of her friends, had started off attended only by her maid.

She had chosen the shady side of the avenue, with its cool background of woods, but it had evidently been done unconsciously, for her attitude was listless, and the few carriages or automobiles which passed, the cries of the children, or the steps of the passers-by, did not seem to disturb her. From time to time she shifted her position, watching her maid as she strode like a sentinel to and fro; but her mind was too much detached to fix her attention fully on what was going on. Her point of view was impersonal, and yet it was as if two natures were striving for the mastery; the faint, unconscious struggle

was real, for presently the true self emerged and became paramount. The objects about her grew vivid and more tangible. The trees, the flowers, the sunlight, no longer dreamlike, began to stand out with greater clearness. The reality of the past few weeks—the death scene, the darkened house, the solemn and elaborate high mass of her faith—lessened in intensity; while the fact that she was alive and well provided with money made her realize to the full that life itself possessed possibilities. Death and sadness no longer barred the way, and she awoke to the realization of an existence replete with a host of glittering probabilities. The very uncertainty of the future did not daunt her by its vastness, but lazily she looked along its hazy path, caring nothing for its very indefiniteness.

Rose turned so as to command a view of the walk on her side of the avenue, and without much real interest watched the people who were strolling by.

The little girls, dainty in their short dresses and broad sashes tied low, with their hoops, seemed in keeping with the general scheme of the scene around Rosamond; but the boys playing with a huge parti-colored ball grated on her sensibilities, because they were so different from American or English ones. They were, however, a product of the country, like the nurses with their beribboned caps and long streamers hanging down behind. A smart-looking lieutenant rode by, his horse under perfect control. He threw more than one languishing glance in Rose's direction. She, however, looked coldly back, with that self-contained air of perfect balance which belongs to the well-bred American woman. The horseman, quite unmoved by her coldness, started to canter, murmuring to himself as he caressed his mustache, "*Pas mal, la petite,*" then disappeared in a cloud of dust.

How much time every one appeared to have! The policeman who passed seemed bent more on pleasure than duty, and even the baker's boy, whistling as he went, did not seem disposed to hurry on his way. Every one seemed to have nothing of much importance to do and all day to do it in. Still, there was not that actual air of indolence which one sees in the southern countries; it was not laziness, but merely a habit, and was evidently but the natural manner of a people to whom it is second-nature not to hurry unnecessarily.

How much more sensible to drift without over-exertion, as the French do, than to shorten life by a span as do the Americans in the feverish activity of daily existence! The English err on the other side. They are, almost, too phlegmatic to admit of any deviation from what old established custom has ordained.

An old lady with her maid and dog were walking along slowly, a solemn-looking trio, and though, as Rose noticed, she was handsomely dressed, the hat which she wore was more suitable for a younger woman and rested on what was palpably a wig. Rose smiled, but her interest was caught by a smart trap which passed, driven by a woman dressed in the height of fashion. The vehicle was drawn by a pair of mules, and a trim-looking groom sat in the seat behind, with folded arms. Rose recognized her as a well-known actress, whose escapades and unconventional life were town talk.

"What," ruminated Miss Barstow, "drives women to a life of that kind! Possibly love and a subsequent betrayal; or the fact, more often asserted than proved, that to succeed an actress needs the protection of some influential man. Can one be happy living such a life? After all, happiness is merely a relative term, and it is but the first step which is hard."

Rose realized suddenly that she was tired—tired of thinking, and wearied of the long morning—as she looked at her watch. Twelve o'clock. Her maid was some distance off. She would wait until she returned, and then would walk on. By the time she reached her hotel in the Rue Daunou, it would be time for luncheon. This being settled, she kept looking in the direction her maid, Amélie, had taken, until she saw her turn back again. Meanwhile, two people passed: an old woman with a cap and basket, talking to herself, and then a man, dark-skinned, with black, curly hair. There was something familiar about the latter, and she scanned him intently. He was looking over a small note-book and apparently did not notice her, though after he had passed he paused and jotted down an item, placed the book in an inner pocket, and then walked on briskly.

Rosamond confessed that she was unwarrantably disturbed, for the man's face haunted her, yet she could not place him. Why should the face of a passing stranger worry her? Where had she seen him before? Suddenly she remembered that he was Carrington's valet, whom she had noticed serving at a small "tea" which Lionel had given in his rooms the year before. Surely Lionel must be in Paris, because he had often told her the man was invaluable, and he could not get on without him. If Lionel were in Paris, why had he not communicated with her? She would follow the man and find out Lionel's address. She rose, but he had disappeared. It was too late, and she must go homeward without the knowledge she would have given a good deal to possess.

At the entrance to the Bois she and Amélie took a cab and drove down the Champs Elysées, that great thoroughfare usually so full of ever new interest for her, past the Rue de Presbourg, the Café des Ambassadeurs, across

the Place de la Concorde, down the crowded Rue de Rivoli, through the Rue Castiglione, then, traversing another large square, with its massive column in the middle, turned thence out of the glittering Rue de la Paix. The cab stopped at a small hotel, where she was enabled to be more private than with her cousin, the Marquise de Chavannes, who had begged her to stop with her in her large hotel on the Champs Elysées.

Amélie paid for the cab and followed Miss Barstow into the hotel. She had noticed the preoccupation which her mistress's puckered brow denoted, but forbore to ask questions. She knew if there were anything she could do, Rose would tell her of it.

She had entered the service of the late Mrs. Barstow the day Rosamond was born. She had been first child nurse, and then maid to her charge. Unlike most old servants, she never presumed, and always had the good sense to know her place. Rose looked on her as a friend, and was willing to retain her services and friendship as long as the faithful creature's strength lasted.

Before taking the lift, Rose asked for her mail. There were three letters. She recognized the writing of two. One was from Mrs. Van Alstyne, and, wonder of wonders, one was from Lionel; the third bore the initials H. M., and must be from Helen Mainwaring.

She jumped into the lift—one of those small, slow ones which one runs oneself—adjusted the mark, and pulled the rope. She was glad to be alone, for she was conscious that her eyes burned and her breath came more quickly, and she did not wish any one to see her emotion.

Her apartments consisted of her own room, an anteroom, a small sitting-room, and a room for her maid. She entered the sitting-room, placed the three letters on the table, which was laid for luncheon, removed her hat,

jacket and gloves, and rang the bell. Before it was answered she caught up Lionel's letter and tore open the envelope. Hearing a noise, she dropped it suddenly, one hand held against her breast. She listened intently. The noise seemed to come from her room. She wheeled around and called out in the forced tone one adopts when startled.

"It is Amélie, mademoiselle. Is there anything I can do for you?" And the gaunt figure of the maid, with her seamed but kindly face, appeared in the doorway leading from the bedroom to the sitting-room.

"I rang for the waiter," said Miss Barstow confusedly; then continuing half apologetically: "I am nervous. I did not know who was there. You are a good soul, Amélie. I shall be all right now. Come back at three. I shall dress to go out then."

Having ordered her luncheon before going out, Rose awaited its arrival.

How complex life was! Her thoughts were still at sea, at times intent on the unexpected appearance of Lionel's servant, and at others disturbed because she could not make up her mind even to break the seals of the other two letters until she had finished her lunch and had had her coffee. She must be alone, and the presence of the waiter, coming and going with the dishes of the various courses, deterred and prevented her from a full perusal of them.

All the way back from the Bois de Boulogne, she had been devising ways and means of obtaining information from Lionel's servant as to the reason of his presence in Paris and his master's whereabouts; but no plans she evolved seemed to lead to any definite result. Here, however, was help at hand, in the shape of a letter from Lionel himself, dated New York. That fact proved he

was not in Paris, unless he had followed up his letter with the utmost promptitude, and this did not seem probable.

At last she had finished her meal, everything had been cleared away, the door was closed, and she was alone, free to give her undivided attention to her mail. She knew she would not be disturbed, and yet, by a curious mental freak, she could not decide which letter to read first. She wished she could read all three together, for each held some especial interest for her. Mrs. Van Alstyne she loved. She had never received any communication from Helen before, and felt inordinate curiosity as to what she could possibly have to say; but Lionel's, on the other hand, she had a passionate desire to read at once. It was a problem, but she decided to read Mrs. Van Alstyne's letter first, then Helen's, leaving Lionel's as a sweet morsel for the last.

Mrs. Van Alstyne wrote naturally and simply. Every line expressed sympathy and love. She begged Rose to look on her as a friend, and to call on her for anything, under any and all circumstances. The letter closed warmly and affectionately. Rose sighed gently as she folded the letter and replaced it in its envelope.

She took up Helen's letter gingerly, and absent-mindedly broke the seal. Instead of drawing the enclosure forth, she paused in hesitation, for she was a little afraid of the writer. She could not make her out, and her motives she invested with an exaggerated degree of seriousness, especially in connection with Lionel. She knew the latter had been unusually attracted by her, but she could never discover how Helen felt on the subject, and of course did not know the outcome of it all. Helen was a débutante of this season, but she was several years older than the others who had just made their bow to

society. Three years ago Mr. Mainwaring had died suddenly, and Helen's mother had left her affairs in the hands of a trusted attorney and gone abroad for an extended stay. This visit had lasted some two years and a half, during which time Helen had studied music. She was almost nineteen at the time of her father's death, and now, being older than her contemporaries, Rose looked on her in the light of a possible rival. The feeling of insecurity was entirely one-sided, as Helen's letter proved. If she had been a very young girl, say of seventeen or eighteen, Rose could imagine that she might easily have become the dupe of a man like Lionel Carrington, and have made him her ideal hero. But Helen Mainwaring, as Rosamond well knew, was mature beyond her years. She had too solid a foundation of common sense to allow her to commit herself unwisely.

Rose's attitude was rather antagonistic as she held Helen's letter at last before her, but the words of ready sympathy, the expression of unselfishness and honesty which breathed in every line, made her feel that she had done the younger girl an injustice. Perhaps a shock would awaken her, for Rose too well knew the rebuffs she herself had been subjected to on more than one occasion. It was only because her love was real and lasting that she had been able to bring her ship into a safe haven, her affection unaltered, unchanged by the touch of Lionel's mastery. Perhaps Helen had not felt the friction of a stronger personality as yet. As Rose read between the lines, she detected that such a nature as Helen's would never yield to the mere fascination of a dominating influence. Some other factor, less clearly defined, but indefinitely more subtle, must develop before a nature of such strength and firmness would yield. Another fact which Miss Barstow evolved was that Helen

at present had no conception of love, and would not awaken to a realization of its potent presence until she reached the definite conclusion, by devious byways, that love was all-pervading, and, in fact, one's whole existence. She let the letter fall unheeded to her lap with a sigh of mingled triumph and contempt; the former because she felt herself free from a fancied interference, free to love Lionel now to the end, whatever should happen; the latter because she scorned any one of her sex who could apparently remain blind or at least apathetic to possibilities so dazzling and, as it seemed, so easily within one's grasp. It was like throwing seeds of happiness on a barren soil, incomprehensible, futile, and a wretched waste of opportunity.

Rose had watched with bitterness Lionel's withdrawal from her own allegiance, at the time deceiving herself as to her real feelings for him. Awakening to the truth, she had been on the point of writing to Helen a cruel, ironical letter. How happy she felt now that she had wisely refrained!

She had no illusions about Lionel. She knew he would never be faithful to wife or mistress, but as she loved him blindly, she could not prevent herself from following his fortunes. Religious as she strove to be, she knew well her scruples would melt if he bade her rise and follow. She felt no shame at the ignoble thought, only a wild desire to do as he wished. She felt that henceforth his will must be her law, and there was neither present regret nor remorse, for without volition she was drifting with the current upon that river of flame which leads sooner or later to destruction. There was no warning given, no helping hand near, and only a merciful God could save her from herself.

She read Lionel's letter once through, quickly, fever-

ishly, then deliberately and more calmly she perused it a second time, smiling half bitterly at the closing, "Faithfully and devotedly, your Lionel." It was so utterly like him, but so cruelly false; yet her pitying smile proclaimed that she weakly forgave him.

One phrase held her attention, and referred to the dismissal of his servant for the supposed theft of a diamond horse-shoe pin, which he subsequently found after the man had left. He acknowledged that the man had a good cause of complaint against him, and he supposed he was now a proper subject for the Mafia or a full-fledged vendetta, as the man was a Sicilian. "I don't believe in any of that nonsense," he added, "though I have been chaffed about it a lot at the club."

The rest of the letter was rambling, expressing the hope that they might meet soon. He closed by stating that he might come abroad, as things—certain things she would not feel interested in—were going none too well. It was a most unsatisfactory letter, except that it explained why he and his servant were separated.

She folded her letters quietly, but with a sense of being unsatisfied. Her mood changed, and she threw them into the grate, where the remains of a small fire were smouldering. She watched intently as the flames danced up and destroyed them; then, turning, walked into her room, where Amélie was awaiting her. She was going to tea at the Chavannes', and nervously hoped her cousin would be alone, for, in her present state of mind, she could not bear to be bored by strangers, though neither could she endure being any longer by herself.

XIV

MAUD had been the only one to hear the beginning of it all! But Society awoke, unprepared, one morning, to learn that Lionel Carrington had disappeared from its midst, like a thief in the night.

Maud received merely a peremptory note from him, saying he wished her to meet him at the law offices of Willard Deane, 16 Broadway, and as she knew it must be a matter of serious importance which induced him to write her so decidedly, she forthwith had made up her mind to go and find out what it all meant. She had not seen or heard from him for some time, but the work of the home had gone on as usual.

She shared the ignorance of the world of Society in regard to the dismissal of his servant, as only four or five men had been told of it at the club, and they were not inclined to take the affair seriously. He received their joking about advising him to wear a mail shirt under his clothes, to beware of "black hand" letters, not to go to Sicily, to beware of the vendetta, and a thousand other laughing suggestions; then they promptly forgot the whole matter, and ordered another round of drinks.

Lionel had laughed with the rest, but the strain of the past few days was beginning to tell on him, and only by the greatest effort of will he managed to retain his composure.

If his companions had known how his habits tinged the present set of circumstances, they would have recognized and understood the hollowness of his mirth, the meaning of his nervousness, and realized the futile attempt he was making to appear calm and unconcerned;

they were immersed in their own affairs, however, and noticed nothing.

A servant of the club handed Lionel a letter. He glanced at its superscription, and started ever so slightly. Unobtrusively he put the letter in his pocket, and with a shaking hand reached for his glass, draining it at a gulp.

For the past week he had been living at the club, having given up his former apartments. The cause for his sudden change of residence, he convinced himself, was the fact that he was not comfortable without a servant, but the truth was that he had received an anonymous letter, which had annoyed and rather disturbed him; so he wished quietly to move out of the sphere of his enemy's influence. The trunks and old dressing-case he left behind him, with directions that they would be called for. He paid his landlady in full, and directed that his letters should be forwarded in the care of his lawyer. This man was shrewd and unscrupulous, but being under obligations to Lionel for a service rendered early in his professional career, he could, as Lionel well knew, be depended on.

In his new surroundings Carrington felt secure, and inclined to laugh at his former feeling of annoyance, until a few days later a second letter was handed to him. As this was unsigned and had been directed to his club, a feeling of anger possessed him, with the additional suspicion that he was being hunted; and the result was that he drank more heavily than usual that night, to give himself courage, as he half laughingly said.

The present case was different. The arrival of a third letter hinted at coming trouble, and he suddenly felt that he must be alone to read it. He rose from his seat and made his way into the adjoining room.

It happened to be vacant, and he took his seat at one

of the desks in the corner, and drew the letter furtively out. The writer stated that "Signor Carrington had dismissed one Giuseppe Marlino, a member of their order, unjustly, and Marlino's honor thereby was smirched; that Signor Carrington had furthermore overlooked answering two communications already sent, so he, the secretary, was instructed to write and acquaint the Signor Carrington with the decree of the society. A sum of money amounting to $10,000 was to be paid (hour and place of payment stated). Failing in this, the second decree was that the affairs of the Signore should be made known, as revealed by certain incriminating letters now in possession of their illustrious society, by the favor of said Marlino, into whose hands by the grace of God, they had graciously fallen. If the first condition were ignored, the next would be carried out, and a sentence of death would be passed on the said Signor Carrington as well. The hand of the society was far-reaching, and he might not hope to escape in whatever part of the world he should go. Beware!" Then followed the skull and cross-bones, with the knife piercing a bleeding heart, the gruesome crest of the society.

Carrington folded the letter and replaced it in his pocket. He felt unnaturally calm, like a man who has been stunned and who has hardly returned to full consciousness as yet. He sat there immovable. His mind seemed incapable of retaining the smallest sensation. It was like the aftermath of some hideous nightmare. Could he have taken another and larger dose of morphia? No, he had no recollection of doing so. He knew, indeed, that the desire for the drug came in cycles. After the morbid craving had been temporarily satisfied, remorse always seized him, and a self-loathing, reacting, gave his will a chance to aid. He had an unusually strong will,

he knew, but he did not stop to think that these periods of self-abnegation must inevitably grow shorter, until the cycles, instead of being distinct and separate, would begin to merge. The drug was his friend as well as his enemy; in which guise would it conquer? Drink, a usual accompaniment, did not help him to overcome the mad desire for a debauch. It was, alas, the same thing, or a substitute which could not satisfy, the desire for which proclaimed the approach of another drug cycle.

He had been drifting. Now suddenly he came back to the present. The man awoke, angry. He saw his way clearly. The three letters must be put into the hands of the police. The best detectives must be engaged. They would find the scent, and the vile scheme be frustrated. Was it possible that in this twentieth century, where progress led, that such a condition could exist, here in the very heart of his native city? The spirit of freedom, the tendency of the age towards simplicity and honesty—were they only empty terms after all?

As he drew a sheet of paper towards him, he thought of the theft of those letters, in which were written the events of his life. Who but a cowardly ruffian would be guilty of such a crime? His face grew pale with anger, and he seized a pen, beginning to write rapidly, the fever of his anger mounting to his brain as his hand flew quickly along.

"It is blackmail!" muttered he, as he sealed the envelope. It was addressed to the police commissioner. After that he wrote to Miss Teniel, and posted the letters himself, fearing the possibility of every one being a spy. When he returned to the club, he telephoned to his lawyer and made an appointment for the following morning.

He slept restlessly that night, but refrained from

taking any stimulant, as he wished to be as clear-headed as possible for the work he had on hand.

Next morning before going out he paid his account, then walked over to Sixth Avenue and took the "Elevated" down town.

Once in the train, he breathed a sigh of relief. He had eluded his enemies. He was safe. Alas! the decrees of Fate are immutable, and the vigilance of a certain order never sleeps; for, as he fancied himself in security, he was being shadowed, his every movement noted. A poor woman, wretchedly clad, sat opposite, having followed him unobtrusively from the time he left the club.

When he reached the station he was bound for Lionel arose, and with a number of other passengers made his way out. The eyes of the poor woman met those of a man among the crowd on the platform, and she nodded twice. Without a sign the man quietly followed the departing figure of Carrington.

If Lionel had been aware of the espionage to which he was being subjected, he would have been extremely uneasy, and he would have wondered how his plans had been discovered so exactly. And yet it was very simple. When he had called up his lawyer the night before on the telephone, he had asked the servant to get the number for him. Though he had forgotten it, he had been careful to give the house address, as well as the office in Broadway, so that there should be no mistake, though he knew he should probably find Deane at home at that hour. When the number was found, for he had to verify it aloud, he repeated his instructions, and the boy called up, leaving the door of the telephone booth ajar. Lionel returned to the main club room, but one of the other servants, apparently on duty in the hallway near

the telephone, was listening and could not very well help hearing, even if such had not been his intention. This man it was who had attached himself to Carrington the day he had moved into the club. He also was a member of the society to which Marlino belonged, and was, in fact, under orders to watch Lionel's actions.

Carrington, with a light though firm step, and the air of one who has been relieved from an intense strain, made his way briskly along Broadway. The shadow disappeared to report. His work was finished for the present. Another was ready at hand to take his place.

The conditions of such a set of circumstances were distinctly unequal. It was at least fifty or more men against one. "Justice and retribution" was the creed of the fifty; but where moral obliquity blunts the senses it is easy to understand that the true meaning of words is lost sight of, or distorted at will to suit the case. Law and order, in the ordinary sense, the men of the order could not grasp, save that law was the decree of those who had sworn to be faithful, and order was the inevitable fiat of fate. They could not realize the actual injustice of it all, because their moral sensibilities had too long been under the influence of false and unnatural teachings. Their minds were attuned to discord, and their point of view was stunted. So it does not seem odd that Lionel, unconsciously, was already, like the heedless fly, standing within the net of deceit spread for him.

Carrington walked on more quickly, and arrived in due time at his friend's office. The office boy, who knew him, said Mr. Deane would be at liberty soon. Would Mr. Carrington take a seat? There was a lady waiting already. Mr. Deane would be right along.

Lionel entered the room and closed the door behind him. The office boy went in to Deane's private office.

Then Carrington turned and confronted Miss Teniel, who rose, as he advanced towards her.

"I am not late, I hope?" she began, but stopped and resumed her seat, at a gesture from him.

"No," he said, taking off his top-coat and hat and throwing them on a chair, and then sitting down at a table in the centre of the room. "No. I am glad we are alone, as I wish to explain certain matters to you before Deane comes in."

He rested one elbow on the table and covered his eyes with his hand, as if the light which he faced hurt him. He removed one glove, but the other hand, still gloved, rested on the edge of the table.

"I hope you are not ill. You look tired out."

He started at her words, and removed the hand which shaded his eyes, to look at her.

"Ill?" he exclaimed sharply. "Of course not. Why should I be ill? I am never ill."

She detected the suspicion, combined with irritation, in his tone, and was silent.

He sat there, also silent, and nervous for no valid reason. He took off his other glove, drummed on the table, took up both gloves, folded them carefully, and after a moment of indecision threw them down impatiently.

"Miss Teniel," he blurted out at last, speaking quickly, "I may have to go away. I give you no reason —no definite reason—for my statement. If I go, I may never return."

He paused to moisten his lips, tried to calm his rising nervousness and excitement, then continued speaking again, seeking to overcome a feeling of suffocation which made his throat dry and his voice harsh.

"After I have gone, I wish you to look after the home,

the home I have loved and striven to make a success of. Mr. Deane will represent me, if you need advice; but you will take my place absolutely at the home. Will you—do you consent?"

There was silence in the room, while Carrington waited, and Maud buried her face in her hands.

She had no love for the man before her, and she could hardly have explained why she should feel any emotion at his request; but she did, and it was two-fold. Her dearest wish was about to be accomplished, but joined with this feeling was one of pity for an unfortunate who had made such a failure of his life and opportunities. When she looked up her face was pale but calm.

"You know, Mr. Carrington, that I will do what you wish; there is no reason why I should not. You know my life is in the home. I love it, and I will always work to make it the success you wish it to be."

Carrington rose and stretched out his hand towards her. His eyes were bright, and he showed plainly how much emotion he felt.

"I thank you. I can say no more."

Before she could touch his outstretched hand the door opened and Deane made his appearance; he invited them into his office.

Even before Lionel introduced him to her, Maud took a dislike to Deane. His manner was insinuating, oily, and too familiar on a first and very casual acquaintance to warrant either respect or trust.

After the three were seated, he addressed her.

"Mr. Carrington, I presume, has told you of his probable intention." Miss Teniel nodded, and he continued: "He came to me a few days ago and asked my advice as to how his affairs could be adjusted during his absence. I refer, of course, to the special fund which is used for

the running expenses and management of the Carrington Home. I have, therefore, prepared this special power of attorney for this fund only, giving you the control of his account for the home in the Amsterdam Trust Company in case he leaves home. He designates you to represent him during his proposed absence."

After Carrington had signed the paper, and Maud had left a specimen of her signature to be sent to the bank, she rose, bowed to Mr. Deane, and held out her hand to Lionel.

"You will let me know when you are going?" she said, and left the room.

Carrington had noticed how brief had been her request, and how commonplace the phrase which accompanied it. It was, he feared, merely a foretaste of what he must expect if he remained in America. Clearly he was losing his assurance. Could that cursed drug already be undermining his courage?

"Come, Carrington, don't lose heart," said Deane. "Be a man. You must not give way. I am your friend, and I will fight for you. I may be crooked to others, but to you, before God, I am and always will be loyal!"

For answer Lionel tossed the three letters down on the table.

"There," he said vehemently, "read those infamous productions. As soon as they find I won't give in to them, the record of my life will be placed before the public. I might postpone it by paying, but that I will not do. I 'll die a social death, but I will not pay blood-money."

"To most people, I would not give that advice," remarked Willard Deane, with an ugly smile on his wizened face, "as I get my percentage from various papers of a certain standing. I tell you, however, em-

phatically, don't pay one red penny to these vultures, unless you wish them to own you."

Lionel drummed impatiently on the table as his friend read the letters.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the lawyer. "I 'd like to lay my hands on that gang. And some day I will. This free country is awakening to the fact that it is suffering from too much foreigner."

Carrington, who had hardly been listening to his friend's utterance, rose and walked impatiently up and down the room.

"Willard," he cried, at last, "every one knows what I am or thinks he does, and they are welcome to call me whatever they please except one thing; but they don't know about that, and I 'd give my last drop of heart's blood to prevent its being known. I 'd lie, I 'd pay any reasonable sum, to keep it from every one's knowledge. You 'll learn about it sooner or later, but I 'd rather tell you myself. Willard—I 'm what they call a morphine fiend. I can't resist it. I 'm ashamed of it. I fear it. I love it. But I loathe myself. I am a miserable, despicable coward."

"Sit down, man," commanded the other, grasping him firmly by the arm. "I am sorry I can't help you," he continued, in what was intended to be a kind tone, "it 's scarcely in my line. Better see a doctor. They make wonderful cures nowadays. They might pull you through."

During the pause which followed, the wretched man remained dry-eyed, with his white face buried in the hollow of his arm. Deane, cold-blooded and case-hardened to scenes of emotion, waited calmly at the window for him to recover.

At length the bowed head was raised, and in a strange, muffled voice Lionel spoke.

"You won't tell any one I told you. The confession was hard—harder than you know—and you won't tell, will you?"

"No," was the gruff response. "Now pull yourself together, and tell me what your plans are."

"My plans? I must have a change, so—I 'm going abroad this afternoon. You and the police can manage these infernal dagos. My trunks and things are at the club. Will you see that they are sent to the steamer? Yourself, mind! You have my power of attorney; get me some drafts on Paris, and bring them with you. Fifty thousand francs will do. Send letters to Poste Restante in Paris for the present, and I will let you know later where I will be. Here is my will—a new one. Keep it. Will you get some one to witness it, if it is all right? Let me hear from you."

At shortly after four o'clock of the same afternoon, Lionel watched the face of his friend recede, until with a sigh he realized that he was bidding adieu to his native land. He waved a last farewell, and turning hastily made his way to his cabin. Perhaps Lionel Carrington would not have been so relieved that night, had he guessed that a cablegram was already on its way to Marlino, in Paris, whither he had been sent to await orders, announcing that Carrington had sailed that day from New York on his way to Paris.

XV

LIONEL passed a restless night, although he would have been infinitely more disturbed if he had dreamt that out of the ashes of a dead past a new life could spring, phœnix-like, menacing, and overwhelming.

The memory of his departure, the copious draughts of champagne he had consumed at dinner, the cigar and solitary walk before he went to bed, all faded as he awoke and went to the port-hole late next morning to look out on a sea dancing with sunbeams.

The next few days Carrington lived in a fool's paradise. It had been rough during those days, but being a good sailor he paced the heaving deck and gloried in his freedom. It was, however, but a temporary lull from care, for the temptation to draw forth the bottle of tablets and measure out carefully the dose once more beset him, and again he fell, to awake from rose-colored dreams to a horrible present. He lived for the remainder of the trip in a waking reverie of delight, punctuated with wastes of despair, where hope was dragged down by his slowly weakening will.

He had made no friends, and now the horror of his position caused him to avoid any attempt at advances in that direction. The fear of discovery made him envelop himself in a cloak of what was considered to be exclusiveness by the other passengers.

The growing fear of being suspected, the terror that he might be found out, made him on the last day feel the necessity of pulling himself together. He conversed with several of the men who seemed least objectionable, and

on his arrival in Paris felt more like himself. As he drove off at dawn from the noisy station to his hotel, he breathed a sigh of relief, the shadow of fear for the time being dissipated by the sun and brightness surrounding him. He did not know that Marlino was following him stealthily, silently, like an avenging spirit biding his time.

Lionel's natural tendency to allow the disagreeable things of life to sink into oblivion prevented him from desiring to know what was passing in the city he had just left. He had turned his back resolutely on the old life, and with a new hope born within him, raised his face fervently to the rising sun. If he had been able to follow the events of the days following his departure, he would have been overwhelmed. He was no coward, but the unutterable disgrace would have dealt him a crushing blow.

Only a few days after Lionel's flight, Deane met the reputed editor of one of the numerous scurrilous sheets, which, by reason of the existence of a free press in a free country, are allowed not only to flourish but to enjoy a wide circulation. The conversation between the two may prove instructive, for it shows clearly the manner of men they both were. The meeting between the two was unexpected, consequently each found himself entirely unprepared and a trifle surprised. However, both considering themselves consummate past masters in the subtlest forms of finesse and diplomacy, recovered themselves with extraordinary ease, each simultaneously recognizing an adversary.

"Ah, my dear fellow, glad to see you!" exclaimed Deane smiling.

Major Scrimmins bowed and smiled too, clasping the other's extended hand in a grip of steel.

Without flinching Deane withdrew his hand, and the two, as if by common consent, fell into step and proceeded slowly up Fifth Avenue.

"The corner of a street on such a windy day is hardly a place to talk comfortably," began the major suavely.

"You wished to talk to me about something particular?" began Deane inquiringly.

The other merely smiled, and the two walked on in silence for some moments.

"Society is vulgar, unless I am very much mistaken," remarked the major tentatively, as if pursuing aloud the tag end of some unspoken thought.

"Where?" asked Deane bluntly.

"I was only thinking aloud," was the guarded answer. "A bad habit it is, but of course I was speaking very generally."

"I see," assented Deane meditatively, but as if he were still unsatisfied.

"When I said society," pursued the major blandly, trying to choose his words carefully, "I was not referring to what is considered the ultra-fashionable set in any one place, but I am afraid I was contrasting the foreign element with our own modest——"

" 'Modest' is a poor word to use—not that I intend any invidious comparisons," was the answer uttered in a neutral tone.

"By modest I meant small," continued the major, as if the explanation were superfluous. "Of course it is pretty generally accepted that most of the members of society are a bad lot from a moral——"

"Or an immoral," laughed Deane coarsely. "Do you

not make exceptions, though? It would be perhaps politic to discriminate."

"I was thinking," pursued the major, not appearing to notice the other's remark, "that the vices of a certain favored class are in some places hardly considered, whereas in a less developed centre they are—crude."

"Very nicely put," agreed Deane. "The vices of the Old World are polished, I grant you. A love affair over there is a sonnet, finished and entirely unobjectionable. Here, I fear, a certain false modesty forces us to be rather vulgar in our lapses. What are you driving at?"

"I was wondering whether you know where Lionel Carrington has gone."

Deane paused, a well-simulated look of surprise on his evil face.

His companion halted also and calmly returned the look of astonished inquiry, saying, "Why, he 's a client of yours. Don't you know where he is?"

"And if I did, I would n't tell you," Deane was on the point of blurting out. What he said aloud was:

"I am truly sorry that I can't tell you."

Scrimmins noted the indifference in the other's tone.

"I am more than sorry. I hoped you could."

"I suppose," remarked Deane, trying to imitate his companion's air of serenity, "you need the information to complete what you have already learned."

"Is there anything more to learn that would be of interest?"

"To your readers?" inquired Deane, with a quiet sneer. "No, nothing more than you know already. Will it appear in the next issue?—of the day after to-morrow, I mean——"

"You are romancing, my dear sir. I am not accustomed to glean information."

"I am glad that you admit that fact," replied Deane triumphantly. "I have always heard that you kept well within the law."

"It is safer," agreed the other; "but of course if I were in doubt, I should apply to you for advice. I must leave you here. Good-bye. Come in when you are at leisure."

"Thank you, major, I will. It is a matter of satisfaction to know you are really the editor of City Living."

"I never said I was, did I?"

"No, but I guessed it."

"You are said to be a shrewd lawyer, I hear."

"Yes," replied Deane smiling; "and I am not ashamed to acknowledge my calling."

"Neither am I," was the courteous rejoinder. "I 'm a reporter. Come and see me soon."

"Sooner than you expect," muttered Deane, as he turned away.

As he walked slowly along, with head bent and hands clasped tightly behind him, who would have recognized him as the jaunty, sharp lawyer, whose bright black eyes usually seemed to be able to pierce the very soul? He appeared to have aged suddenly. Abruptly Deane stopped and cursed below his breath, rating himself as a fool for his stupidity. He was roused in the twinkling of an eye, almost as if sharply tapped on the forehead. Upright, walking briskly along and muttering to himself, he made his way to the office where Scrimmins was supposed to have desk room. It was quite clear to him now that the editor was in possession of Carrington's letters—letters written in a burst of confidence to his mistress and returned to him before she died—which he had evidently purchased from the members of the secret society to which Lionel's former servant belonged. They

had not told him where their intended victim had gone, withholding the information because Scrimmins refused to pay further for it; and the wily wolf, knowing Deane would be the man who would be likely to know, had tried to force him to disclose his client's whereabouts.

It was obvious that firmness was necessary if he hoped to succeed on behalf of his client. The major was well known to be unscrupulous, mean, and devoid of any nice feelings; but Deane meant to gain possession of those letters before the day was much older. He knew that Scrimmins was quite low enough to be open to bribery, but also that he wished to be considered a gentleman. It would be a difficult task, and one calling for the nicest exercise of diplomacy, to convince the old man that it was not at all inconsistent with his vaunted position of gentleman to sell what he had bought for gain; it was merely a little matter of business between men of the world.

It seemed impossible that he could fail. He was full of schemes as he strode along, and when he drew near the building, he stopped and looked up with the light of triumph already shining from his eyes. He entered the lift confidently, only to be met with disappointment on his arrival. No, the office boy did not know where he had gone. No, he had no regular office hours. He came and went. After further effort, Deane succeeded in being shown into Scrimmins's private office, where he wrote and left a note on the editor's desk. As soon as he had taken his departure the boy made a face. The grimace suggested pain, and his vulgar remark accompanying it left no doubt in the minds of his hearers as to what his opinion of the departed visitor was. In the laugh which followed, no one laughed louder than the editor himself, who suddenly popped out like a rabbit

from a hole and received the note from the hands of the office boy, giving a concise order before returning to the room he had vacated:

"If that squatter comes back again, tell him I am away, out of the city, see? Back on Friday. Savez?"

The bang of a door followed, and all was quiet save the scratching of innumerable pens. The interrupted routine of the office had been resumed. The staff was busy. It knew nothing. Its work was copying reports on foreign affairs, of premières at the theatres, reports of the various markets, and a careful list of the best known, newer works of fiction. It was altogether a quiet picture of a well-managed newspaper, with no unnecessary noise or disturbance not warranted by a strict attention to business.

Deane was no more successful later in the day, but his sharp eyes noted that his letter to Scrimmins had disappeared. No better luck next day, and he began to despair. On Thursday afternoon he tried to buy a copy of City Living, but was unable to do so. He was informed that they were just out of it. There had been an unprecedented sale. Some racy story had hit the public, the dealer said.

"Say, I 'll send a copy to your office. Sure—to-morrow before ten. Right."

On Friday the blow fell, and the details of Lionel's private life were public property. After the second day not a copy of the vile sheet was to be had, and the details, in all their revolting, staring blackness, had been read by thousands and tens of thousands.

Deane read his copy carefully through to the end. He understood the fascination of such stuff, the fearful desire of learning to the point of satiety of the fall of one who had been a member of the inner circle but was

now damned as an outsider. Very much the same feeling is produced when a murderer is condemned to death, only then it is one of morbid sympathy. One does not stop to consider the reason, to ask why we are drawn forward when we should recoil; we act on what is but the reflex action of the normal sense of the fitness of things.

It was no time, however, to moralize. It was too essentially the time for action. He must see Scrimmins, and that without delay. He would not be put off with plausible excuses. He would find the man by hook or by crook, and force him to retract the calumny. It should be shown that he was the guardian and champion of his friend's reputation. By this time he had worked himself up into a state of silent rage. He constructed reasons, he deduced arguments by which his antagonist would be forced to yield; and when he finally reached the office he was primed and ready for action. At last, face to face and alone with his adversary, he spread out a copy of the paper containing the slanderous tale, as he angrily denounced it, and pointing to it with a fierce gesture, said:

"This—this fairy story must be retracted in full. Do you hear me? Name your price."

"If you care to mention a sum, I should feel disposed to consider it. It is merely a matter of business between —gentlemen."

Deane gasped. His own arguments stolen by another, and that one, *mirabile dictu,* his opponent! However, he recovered himself as quickly as possible, and drawing out his check-book, opened it.

"I will give you ten thousand dollars down, minus my commission, if you will retract this fantastic story in full —absolutely—in your next issue," he insinuated slyly.

"Done."

Upon reflection later Deane did not feel that he had achieved such a complete triumph as he had at first thought. The celerity of the transaction, the evident ease with which Scrimmins had played into his hands, should have made him pause and consider his position. He had paid out a sum of money, contrary to the advice he had given Lionel, and had obtained in exchange a paper promising to deny the story—plus, of course, his percentage. Meanwhile, a week must elapse before this denial could be made, and all those who had read the story would have ample time to let it sink it. The tale would be believed even in the face of a denial; he had not bettered his client's cause, but, what was worse, he feared that through his hasty action he had lost any chance of legal redress. He had the letters in his pocket, to be sure, but he was disgusted with the only too obvious result of his efforts.

He hoped most earnestly that Lionel would not learn of the part he had played, and, indeed, he did not see how that could happen. The major's hands were tied, as he had not mentioned that he knew of Lionel's whereabouts, though the promptitude with which his offer had been accepted made it seem possible that he had bought that information since and was satisfied as to the profit he had made. It was hardly probable that Carrington would hear the story, but if he did it could not be helped. It would be through no fault of Deane's, and he could only hope for the best.

Having arrived at this point, he should have felt more satisfied—but he could not help thinking that his stupidity at the outset had made his subsequent action futile. He was clearly losing faith in his powers, but then his adversary had taken him unawares. He should have guessed that the quiet, assured manner of the old

man had meant mischief, and he could not help blaming himself for his lack of foresight. However, what is done cannot be undone, and at this thought he shuddered at the memory of the printed words, the story of a man's shame, which had only this morning danced before his eyes. Had he done right? Could he have acted differently? His commission acted as a balm, but somehow he felt strangely alone and unable to cope further with the situation. He wished he could discuss the matter with some one, some one who was safe and could advise him. But to whom was he to go? Who, even among friends, could he trust? Suddenly a name flashed through his brain. Miss Teniel! Why not? She was connected with some of Lionel Carrington's interests; why not with all? He would go out and see her without delay. Another's judgment, a cool head, would help to steady his nerves and cause him to see more clearly his position. If he had not been sincerely attached to his friend, he would not have felt the necessity of taking so much trouble to justify his actions to himself—but he could not remain callous as he would have done with others.

As he neared the entrance to the Carrington Home grounds, he noticed a young lady walking just ahead of him. He slackened his pace to allow her to reach the house first.

Standing near the foot of the steps, hidden by the shrubbery, he waited for her to go in, and could not help overhearing the words she spoke as the door opened.

"Maud, it is I. I wish to forget."

Deane paused a few minutes; the words he had heard had no meaning for him. Then he mounted the steps and rang the bell.

XVI

DEANE'S interview with Miss Teniel merely reviewed the situation briefly. She answered that she regretted the publication of Lionel's story, but he could see clearly from her manner that no personal note was involved. For a moment the thought flashed through his mind that she might have been the informant, but her real interest in this pet scheme of Carrington's, the home, made such a supposition highly improbable. She agreed with him that against such odds as he had been forced to accept no one, not even a more astute man, could have hoped for better success. No, she did not advocate communicating with Lionel. Her reasons were many, but the most convincing was her complete understanding of Carrington's character. Yes, probably under the circumstances he would avoid large centres; he would try to escape meeting friends, and certainly would not seek to make acquaintances. It would be natural for him to go to some spot far removed from the beaten track, and there bury himself. He would only write, she asserted, on matters of business. If matters of a purely personal character should arise, he would try other means before they heard from him.

After Deane had left, Miss Teniel felt that she had foolishly wasted enough of her valuable time when she had many more urgent things on hand, so she read over two reports, approved them, and carefully supervised a list of purchases recommended by the heads of departments. Reports, a new method made necessary by the change of management, were sent in to her with an appended list of what each department considered neces-

sary. In this way the responsibility of details was delegated to several heads, while the absolute power of regulation remained in herself. It made her task easier than before, when her power was limited, for it systematized the routine, bringing out what was best in each one of her subordinates; and it transformed them from mere figure-heads to positions of usefulness and importance. But whatever advantages the new system had over the old, the more satisfying knowledge remained with her that she herself, and no other, was the autocrat.

Her work for the moment finished, she lay back in her chair and, with hands idly folded in her lap, allowed herself to dream. She passed over the events of the winter, contrasting the past with the possibilities of the future. From the maze of her reverie, one person stood out clear, and that person was Helen. Would Love ever come nearer and, touching her lightly, free her in the twinkling of an eye, even as Death mercifully releases the soul from bondage, bringing it free and unrestrained face to face with its Maker?

Maud gazed wistfully out on the smiling landscape, for she knew that Helen must awaken of her own accord. The essence of love must first impregnate the sleeping seeds of desire in the core of that quiet soul, and the birth of love itself would be the result.

Maud sighed, for it was not encouraging to paint mental pictures when the pigments were those of fancy alone. Was it not better to look at the result in all its glaring reality? She confessed to have yielded momentarily to the charm of what she desired, but the real facts, alas, did not blend with her flights of phantasy. If she were to build it must be on a foundation of truth, and when the structure was finished as far as the materials

at hand went, she could tell at what point weakness existed.

She did not consider Stephen seriously. She gave him merely a passing thought, hoping he would have patience and not make the fatal mistake of trying to force matters to an issue. The master hand would not prevail with Helen; it must rather be the subtle force of steel in the velvet glove.

Maud had learned many facts from observation, however. These facts had been strengthened by circumstances, by conversations with Stephen, and by words which Helen herself had let fall. That Helen was sincere was shown by the fact that she spoke at all on the subject. If she had realized how eagerly Maud had listened to what she said about Stephen, Helen would either not have betrayed her state of mind, or have known how unconsciously she was drifting perilously nearer to a decision. It was with the sweet innocence of a child that she had spoken.

Miss Teniel knew that Helen had seen a good deal of young Carrington lately, and that she had completely overcome her former feeling of repulsion for him. How hard this had been only Maud herself could conceive. It had been doubly so in the face of his brother's unfortunate influence. When Lionel had shown himself in his true colors, it had made it easier to attempt to alienate the one, and, perhaps, feel pity for the other. Maud guessed that to be the case, and, though pity is akin to love, she felt that she ought not to confound the quality of Helen's interest with its deeper and more lasting tenderness. Music, she knew, had been one of the factors which had wrought this change. On that common ground they had met as equals. From the subject to the man was an easy transition, and it would seem

that Stephen had first managed to bridge the chasm almost insensibly, and then to sow the germ of interest, patiently waiting for it to quicken under the warmth of his passion. But was Helen's feeling of pity akin after all to love, and would the germ prove to be one of passion indeed? She could not tell. Helen, she knew had induced Stephen to come out to the home with her on more than one occasion. Why did she do this? Did she feel happier when he was with her, or had she a desire to see him in his brother's place? Now that Helen had returned to her interrupted occupation, it would be easier to tell whether Stephen came for his own sake, or because he believed he was pleasing her by so doing.

Miss Teniel rose and pushed back her chair. She had work to do, and could not afford to allow her thoughts to interfere with it any longer. Walking to the window, she looked out. She was glad that Helen had come back to the home. As if in answer to this thought, she saw a deformed figure slowly make its way along a path which led to a grove of trees beyond the house. As she left the room and passed into the corridor she saw Helen looking out of a window.

"Helen!" she said gently, wondering if she too had seen the passer-by.

"Why, Maud, I declare you startled me!" was the quick rejoinder; then, more calmly, Helen continued, "I have a headache, and I think the air will do me good. You see, I told Mr. Carrington to come out—and I have just seen him pass."

At these words Maud felt herself shut out from the light, and kissing the girl lightly, passed on to her neglected duties. Helen of course was not like other women; if she had been, Maud would have had great difficulty to refrain from bursting into song, and the

melody would have been of a triumphant character, as if the battle were already half won. But Helen was Helen, and not to be judged by ordinary standards, so Maud's smile was without enthusiasm. As she proceeded to resume her work, her face assumed its ordinary gravity, and she became once more the woman whose chief aim was duty to an ideal, an automaton whose feelings were subservient to the routine of daily existence. Bending over the sick-bed of a poor woman, she allowed the interests of self to diminish, and forgot for the moment what had been of such paramount importance so short a time ago.

Stephen had risen from the bench against which he had placed his sketching easel and the various other impedimenta connected with his drawing, to await Helen's approach. When they were seated side by side, he turned and looked timidly at the lovely profile beside him. The girl was looking across the fields, absorbed in thought. He did not dare to break in on her day-dream, but openly looked his admiration. Hidden from the view of the house, as if no one else in the whole wide world lived or even existed, Stephen trembled from the intensity of his desire. Helen did not move, she hardly seemed aware of his presence; so resolutely he turned his eyes away and sighed. At the sound, Helen turned to him inquiringly.

"Don't think me rude, but I am rather absent-minded to-day," she said.

"I did n't say anything."

"No? Then what is the matter?"

She had caught something in his tone which forced the words from her involuntarily, and now she waited impatiently for him to answer.

He did not do so at once, and an expression of infinite

sadness settled on his countenance as he looked away from the eyes he dared not meet. Wonderingly she waited for the words it seemed impossible for him to utter.

"You do not know how I am suffering—daily, hourly, acutely—but why should I speak to you of this? Do you know," he went on quickly, without allowing her a chance to speak, "what it is to be in pain—not physical, for I am used to that by this time, God knows—but mental agony, which, like an unquenchable fire, one must endure to the end? It is within the reach of man, thanks to science, to control physical pain temporarily. But for that inward gnawing, there is no earthly rest. It lies with God Himself to end its spasms in the quiet of the grave, where that peace which passeth all human understanding alone will find its home."

"I do not understand—you speak so strangely, so unnaturally. I am afraid you are ill."

"Ah, no! I am not ill," he replied sadly, "not in the way you mean." He straightened himself as he spoke, and seemed thus to put on the strength of a long-formed desire. There was resolution, too, in his bearing, and Helen felt herself compelled to listen even against her will.

"Will you let me speak out freely?" he asked gently. Taking consent for granted, as she vouchsafed no reply, he continued softly:

"Do you remember the day we first met? Yes, I see you do. Well, even then I had the hardihood to hope you might conquer the distaste I could see you felt for me. Do not speak, let me ramble on. I had always longed for a friend, another self in whom I might confide. Will you be that friend now and listen to me?"

"Why, of course, I suppose so," answered Helen uneasily.

"I knew you would be kind to me, and I need your help more than any one's now. I know I am unworthy, that I have no right to suppose that——"

Aroused by the feverish note his voice had assumed, she took advantage of his hesitation and filled in the pause which followed, quickly—for fear she should be interrupted:

"I know you are unhappy." Helen was merely speaking the truth. Some women would have taken the present instance as an opportunity for a display of coquetry, but not so Miss Mainwaring, who was too honest, too unversed in the intricate ways of the world, to seize the possibilities of the situation. She spoke her mind fearlessly, without considering the ultimate result.

"You are right in saying that when we first met you discerned a look on my face which—I was not able to overcome. Then, as we talked of music, I forgot the incident and despised myself for such an ignoble thought."

Stephen listened eagerly drinking in her words. He seemed to be making the acquaintance of another Helen, one who had come into existence since he had known and loved her first. It was long since that wonderful day. But now, as he looked at the beautiful face with the clear eyes looking into his, the past merged into the present and the future loomed out bright and joyous. It was only to such a woman as this that he could speak without restraint. To a sensitive nature like his, sympathy would have been impossible. If, furthermore, she had sought to make him ridiculous by means of the thousand and one wiles her sex loved, he would have groaned in spirit. Life would have been but a mockery, instead

of the bright bauble whose glitter he loved to watch and admire.

"Will you—You must tell me all—I insist."

"Yes," answered Stephen, "I will. I must ask you for a moment to consider my life, and to recognize me as unfit, on account of my infirmity, to take my place in the world. As a boy, I could not play as other boys, and it enraged me. My body is crooked, and my belief in justice—in the eternal fitness of things—is warped. How can it be otherwise? I am told I have talent in music, but unless there is some one in sympathy with me, I should feel lonely even though success were to come. Have you ever longed for something beyond your reach, as children cry for the moon? Have you ever felt that you could not get it because you were only half-hearted, feeling yourself unworthy of the reward? No, you have not; for you can stand up with your fellow-men on an equal footing, equipped for the struggle which, for you, is no struggle."

Stephen's voice had fallen toward the end of his speech, but Helen could not resist the obvious, though unconscious challenge it contained.

"Ah, you must not entertain such thoughts. You are worthy of a better fate than you are painting for yourself. You should be above such considerations, indeed you should!"

"Dear Miss Mainwaring," he answered sadly, "you may be right, but I cannot rise alone. I suppose that is morbid, but such is my nature. I need some one to take me out of myself, to help me find the road to happiness, which my soul's blindness hides from me."

"I am sorry for you, especially as I know what a hard year it has been for you. I don't wish to refer more often than I can help to those who are nearest in kin to

you—save to say that you must live the past down. You can do it, and you must."

Stephen looked around at her sharply, for her words were so much at variance with his thoughts that he wondered if she were wilfully playing at cross-purposes with him. Could it be possible she understood his meaning so little, or did she think it probable she could throw dust in his eyes with any degree of success? He laughed bitterly. He must speak more plainly, although he had not intended to do so at first. His plan had been to sound her and judge if it were wise to go further. Having apparently failed to rouse her sympathy, and feeling it impossible she could ever love him, still he realized that he had gone too far to recede.

"I am afraid," he began, with considerable diffidence, "we have been playing at odds, so you must bear with me while I try to make my meaning clear. You fancied that I was enlisting your sympathy because of my brother's downfall. You thought that this was the cross I had to bear. Is the gift of true friendship, which you were willing to give me freely, so misleading? I ask more than friendship. Out of my great unworthiness, I dare to ask for—love."

The scene was unchanged, but over the smiling landscape was spread a subtle difference. The sun shone, but with brilliancy diminished, as if its light were filtered instead of being bright and clear as before. The very sounds of nature seemed strangely stilled, and the silence smote him with a pang of despair, until the pitiless beating of his heart stunned him into a return of consciousness.

The voice of the woman at first came to him as if from afar. The words were mere murmurs and their meaning

unintelligible. He must force himself to listen—he must hear what she was saying.

"I am sorry," she sighed gently, "more than sorry—for you. I wished to—help you. I do feel the greatest interest in you, but it might have been better if you had not spoken—yet. I do not—cannot answer you. I am not sure of myself. I pity you, I feel for you, and if I could—but no, I regret to say I cannot accept you—not yet, at least. You see that you have forced me to a decision. Perhaps some day—but, would it not be wiser to accept my answer now as final? I wish to be kind as well as just, and—what *had* I better do?"

"I understand," he said at last, as if the words were being forced from him. "I understand only too well."

She attempted to speak, but no sound came. He rose and took out his watch, looked at it, and replaced it in his pocket. He seemed unconscious of his action. He turned away, and with careful deliberation picked up his sketching materials. A little book fell to the ground. He stooped and recovered it.

"Miss Mainwaring," he said, facing her with a poor attempt at composure, "I brought this book with me to-day intending to give it to you. After what has happened, would you still care to have it?"

She took the little book as if in a dream, and he, thinking he read a subtle message as their eyes met for a brief instant, took her hand in his and gently kissed it. Then abruptly he walked away without turning to look back.

Helen gazed after his retreating figure sadly until she could see him no longer. The book was slipping from her hand, and she grasped it more tightly. Suddenly she began to feel tired. She passed her hand wearily over her brow, for she regretted that Stephen had spoken; by so doing their pleasant companionship, which had begun

to mean so much to her, had come to an end. She was depressed because she had lost a friend, being conscious of no deeper feeling for him as yet. That might come later, when some subtle power as yet dormant, had awakened her to a semblance of the truth.

She rose and, holding the little volume close to her like some living thing, walked swiftly back to the house.

XVII

SOME few days later, Helen lunched with Mrs. Van Alstyne.

The two ladies were at the present moment having coffee in the library.

"You look tired, dear Helen," remarked Mrs. Van Alstyne solicitously, glancing at her guest as she put her cup down on a table near by.

"Tired? I don't know," was the wondering reply, "I suppose I am. But I have so much to do, and I am so interested in my work, I hardly have time to think about myself. I need a great deal of work to—take me out of it all. I don't mean that, of course—but to give me occupation," she concluded very lamely.

"Maud tells me you are a great help to her, but you must not overdo it. You look run down and pale, as it is."

"You see," continued Helen, rather wistfully, "I have grown into the home. I found a place there for myself, and it 's really the only thing I care for."

"Are you sure, my dear," asked the kindly old lady, "that you are really in earnest? You know, when one is young, one's ideals are rather high-flown and imagination is very supple. I don't mean to ridicule your efforts, nor to belittle them, but I feel that it is so easy to make mistakes when one has seen so little of other pursuits. Experience does teach, you know, if we are only willing to learn. When it fails, it is not the teacher who is at fault, but the pupil who is too dull to see the advantages he is wantonly throwing away. You do not, you must not, mind my plain-speaking, for I am an old woman, and I

have seen a great deal of the world; besides, my dear Helen, I am very fond of you, and I am trying to speak in your best interests."

"I am sure it is very kind of you to be so frank," answered Helen, "for I sometimes feel as if I were very much alone. I am devoted to my mother, but she does not understand me. I am only an enigma to her, and it is impossible for her to feel much in sympathy with any one if there is no community of interest. Are you shocked?"

"No," was the soft answer, "I am interested in what you say, and I am learning something from you, something new, every time I see you."

"I am glad you do understand," said Helen simply, "for I really believe that mother thinks I am losing my senses. She cannot see why a girl with my prospects, as she expresses it, should deliberately turn her back on the world and waste her time in hospital work."

In the slightly aggrieved tone which Helen's voice unconsciously assumed, Mrs. Van Alstyne felt herself answered, but she continued nevertheless to probe a little deeper.

"You ought to fall in love. It would be the making of you."

Helen did not answer. She stared straight before her.

"Why don't you, I ask? It 's the best advice I can offer you." Mrs. Van Alstyne paused, but the motionless figure of the young girl gave no sign that she had heard.

"It 's the surest test that you have chosen rightly. You would not talk then of levels. You would not hesitate to answer, but would tell me without evasion that you were right, and that you know it."

"Please don't say any more," begged Helen, speaking

with an ill-concealed effort. "It 's no use. Why, don't you know," she continued more earnestly, "that I have been told I am not capable of loving?"

"Pshaw!" commented the older woman briefly and concisely. Then in quite another tone, "Just as you say, my dear. You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink," she added in a low tone.

Helen was clearly preoccupied. Could it be that she was annoyed with her for speaking out so openly, or had she hit on some knotty problem she was trying to solve?

"What are you thinking so deeply about?" she inquired at last, prompted by curiosity alone.

"Nothing," replied Helen evasively.

"Nonsense!" persisted Mrs. Van Alstyne, nettled by Helen's reticence, "I don't see why you won't tell me," she added persuasively, changing her tactics with a suddenness which surprised her guest.

"Really, it is nothing—or almost nothing."

"Indeed!" was the ironical rejoinder. "And you expect me to believe that? Come, Helen Mainwaring, no one can throw sand in my eyes, so don't try. Just now you were so curt with me that I might have taken offense if I had wished. But I am too fond of you to pick a quarrel over a trifle. Besides, I want to know what has made you so quiet and reserved of late. Come! Out with it."

"I can't imagine why you are so persistent," retorted Helen nervously. "It seems to me perfectly natural to think over things only of interest to oneself. You are really making a mountain out of nothing. Besides, I cannot see what particular reason you can have for wishing me to speak my thoughts aloud. If I say it is nothing, why won't you believe me?"

"Let me tell you once and for all," answered Mrs.

Van Alstyne, with mock severity, "that it is a very poor argument to answer one question by putting another." She knew this was the only tone to adopt with Helen if she hoped to gain any information from her. As the young girl did not answer, she continued to direct harmless shots at her, thinking to arouse her to action by this species of counter-irritation.

"You say it is nothing, but you admit having some thoughts. It is merely a kind of quibbling."

Helen kept her temper admirably. In fact, she managed to interject at intervals a nervous laugh.

"My reason, for which you ask," pursued her tormentor, "is that I wish to know. And what is more, my dear child, I propose to continue goading you until you tell me of your own free will."

"Of all the Irish bulls I have ever heard," exclaimed Helen, now laughing outright, "that is the most glaring."

After a futile attempt to control herself, Mrs. Van Alstyne relaxed and her severe expression changed to one of amusement.

"Won't you trust me?" she said appealingly. "Yes, I know I am a fraud. You don't want, or I mean you did n't wish, to tell me because you were afraid I would laugh at you. Is n't that true?"

"Yes," Helen admitted reluctantly, becoming suddenly grave; "that is true."

She thought of Lionel, and a sense of loneliness pervaded her drooping spirits. This she dismissed quickly, however, feeling the necessity of some great renunciation, and the words of Stephen's farewell in turn smote on her heart with a twinge of regret. Did she love him, after all, and had her indecision at a critical moment caused her to make a fatal and perhaps irretrievable

error, one that she might always regret? She thought with tenderness of the poor, saddened man, who owed his loneliness to her, and to her alone. Alas, did she care? Was her fault irremediable? Did, oh, did she feel anything deeper than friendship for him? She could not tell.

"Ah, my dear, I am rarely at fault," sighed Mrs. Van Alstyne after a pause.

"I have been wondering," continued Helen earnestly, "whether after all I belong to a class of women who are destined never to love. I 'm sure I have within me something unresponsive—my heart perhaps."

"Did you get that idea from—a book?" queried Mrs. Van Alstyne suspiciously, "and—did the woman fall in love at last, marry and live happily ever afterwards? They usually do—in novels."

"It was a man who told me—I did not find it in a book at all," answered Helen quickly.

"Humph!" interpolated the other continuing her line of thought obstinately. "It is not reliable, to my mind, to get information from a book of fiction, but a man—I don't wish to prejudice you, my dear—is full of stock phrases which mean little or nothing. He always has a purpose, but very few books can be said to have any, unless it is one of those modern novels, which I detest, and then it is always an immoral one. So, you see, both sources are to be distrusted. It 's better to get your knowledge first-hand."

"What do you mean by first-hand?"

"In the surest and most reliable way," was the unsatisfactory reply. "In order to live, one must learn how. Try to find out how. Whatever happens, if you have only trust and confidence, you cannot stray far. It is not a game you are playing; it is much more serious

than that. You are making a choice and should be guided, yes—that is the way—guided by the mistakes of others. They will be a help to you and enable you to avoid pitfalls. Life is a very real business, and you have your rôle to enact in it. See that you play fairly and to the best of your ability."

"You are so good to me, dear Mrs. Van Alstyne," burst from Helen involuntarily, "and I love you. You believe then that I am sincere, don't you?"

Mrs. Van Alstyne's voice was very gentle as she answered the young girl's soft appeal. She realized that she had pushed her far enough, and it would be wiser to permit her now to work out her own fate unaided. She had gone as deep as she dared, and she had gleaned very little for her pains. The girl was very dear to her, and it was doubtless because she was so different from others that she felt drawn to her especially. Of course it was absurd for her to become interested to such an extent in the Carrington Home. Such women as she were not brought into the world to bury themselves. They were intended to shine forth in the full glare of the sun. Helen was quite honest in supposing she was settled, but she was like a bud just beginning to blossom, to push aside its leaves bravely, without knowing the power of the orb of day. She thought she saw her way clearly; but, not having lived, she had no idea of the possibilities of life. Perhaps after all it would all be for the best, and these phases through which Helen was passing were necessary to prepare her for the fulfilment of her destiny.

Having arrived at this conclusion, the only possible solution of the difficulty, Mrs. Van Alstyne rose and, turning to the subject of her thoughts, suggested that she go up-stairs and lie down.

"I can't do that," said Helen rising, "as I must be going."

"Where are you off to?"

"I am going to spend the night with Maud. Not to work, but to rest, for I must admit being a good deal run down and depressed."

"Make it more than one night, dear. It will do you lots of good."

Helen was so touched by Mrs. Van Alstyne's words that she leaned forward and kissed her, and then, with a rueful smile, took her leave.

Meanwhile, while the above conversation was in progress, a very different one was taking place in the Carrington Home, whither Helen herself was bound; and the principals were Mrs. Mainwaring and Miss Teniel.

It was like Mrs. Mainwaring not to have told her daughter where she was lunching. Not having spoken of her own plans, Helen could not have guessed that when the train which carried her out to Laurence passed the in-going one, her mother was actually on her way from the Carrington Home, where she had been to see Maud. Mrs. Mainwaring had telephoned Miss Teniel only that morning, after coming to the conclusion that she would like to know what Maud thought of Helen, never having talked that important matter over with her before.

Mrs. Van Alstyne had been both kind and sympathetic when the subject was presented to her, but Mrs. Mainwaring had retired from that encounter, as she chose to consider it, with a subdued feeling that she had received very little practical advice or encouragement. Perhaps Mrs. Van Alstyne had not understood how she felt on the subject, or how bitterly disappointed she was that she, the girl's own mother, had so little in common

with Helen; and, though she would not acknowledge it, and least of all to that self-contained and self-satisfied old lady, she had the uncomfortable sensation that indirectly her dignity had been injured by Helen's incomprehensible conduct.

There was another reason why she had been dissatisfied by her interview with Mrs. Van Alstyne, for the truth was, she was just a little afraid of that magisterial eye which looked so coldly at her, and of the ample form which seemed to overpower her by its very complacency, from her fear that it would be utterly impossible to cope, with any degree of success, with a personality so all-embracing, and, she added as a concession to her wounded feelings, so absolutely dominating.

Her feelings at the beginning of her conversation with Maud were different. In the first place, there was no antagonism, either real or supposed, between the two ladies, and Mrs. Mainwaring consequently felt more sure of herself, imagining that she would stand a fairer chance of real aid in this instance than in the former one.

In the second place, Maud was a good friend and absolutely sincere. Not that Mrs. Van Alstyne was not reliable, but the conditions were not the same. From the first moment Mrs. Mainwaring had taken Maud's hand and looked into her steadfast though kindly eye, she had felt convinced that she was in good and safe hands.

Doubtless it would be an impossibility for a person of Mrs. Mainwaring's calibre to be at all times thoroughly happy. Unlike Madame de Montespan, she could not say that she was happy and desired to be so, for unless she had an imaginary grievance to contend with, she did not consider herself even remotely contented.

Of course if Mrs. Mainwaring had been more self-reliant, if, too, she had not attached so much importance to the necessity of her daughter's appearance in the world, or if her natural affection for the girl had not been restrained by a code of her own small world, the necessity for the empty form of asking the advice of a woman like Mrs. Van Alstyne or even of Maud herself, would not have been necessary. Her disappointment in the subject of the discussions would have been amply made up for by the young girl's more real happiness, for happiness is more to be desired than the vain pleasures of our daily existence, aye, than much fine gold. Nevertheless, she listened with complacency to Miss Teniel, as they sat together in Maud's office after luncheon.

Miss Teniel looked down at her blotting pad as she spoke, drawing aimless and indeterminate figures thereon, at times making a stab with her pencil to emphasize some crucial point. She forgot as she proceeded, that the woman who hung on her words was Helen's mother, whom she had so often designated as a mere figure-head. She allowed her admiration for the young girl to shine forth serenely, until she happened to look up at Mrs. Mainwaring, and saw that she was listening with her tongue stuck into her cheek—a habit she had when she felt the conversation was becoming too one-sided or beyond her comprehension.

Maud paused and looked suddenly out of the window, veiling a half smile, which was one purely of indulgence for the frailty of the other.

Mrs. Mainwaring, who was seated in what Helen had called the one comfortable chair in the room, leaned forward and, resting her hands on the two arms of the chair, began to speak in a soft, evenly modulated voice.

As she proceeded, the velvety tone gave way to the harsher beat of querulousness, noticing which, Miss Teniel's half smile vanished, and, turning, she regarded her companion with a faint frown.

But her mood changed as eye met eye, clashed, wavered, and broke, until Mrs. Mainwaring looked down questioningly at her hands, which she had suddenly folded in lap. Maud glanced out through the window again, her smile, half scornful, half triumphant, changing to sadness as she scanned the painted landscape before her.

"The pity of it!" she murmured several times.

"Maud, what are you saying?"

"I am sorry for you, that is all."

"I don't need your sympathy yet, dear Maud, for Helen has not actually left me. We have still a few ideas in common. What I do want, however, is your moral support for my views, my disappointed ambition. There! I have spoken out my heart to you."

Maud stared at her visitor for some seconds without speaking. Her surprise gave place to curiosity. She could not imagine how a mother could blind herself by taking such a morbid view of the situation. Perhaps it was because she was capable of looking at it from only one side. Ambition within narrow limits, worldliness, and a total impossibility to accept any view which did not fit in with her own narrow thoughts, were evidently responsible for her attitude.

"I don't think there is any more to be said," exclaimed Maud, after being forced to listen again to a rather more severe philippic.

"You snap off your words so," complained Mrs. Mainwaring in a tone which seemed to imply tolerance for

the faults of a child, "that you sometimes confuse me; but I know you do not mean it, so I am not angry, my dear—only hurt that we should not have found some community of interest in the subject I came to consult you about."

"I think we both love her," began Miss Teniel weakly.

"That is not what I meant," objected Mrs. Mainwaring, "but I hoped you would stand by me more satisfactorily than you have."

Maud, who was engaged in drawing an intricate geometrical figure on the blotting pad, paused abruptly in her work, but, checking a rejoinder which would have done more harm than good, gave a particularly vicious dig at the blotter, and, her feelings being thereby relieved, she smiled without looking up. What could she say to such a narrow-minded, unsatisfactory person? She was so firm, reflected Maud—but correcting herself quickly as a new thought formed itself in her mind. No, it was not firmness, it was obstinacy. That was very apt to be the case with people who were not overly brilliant, broad-minded or tolerant.

She looked ruminatingly at her broken pencil, which she still held, and then with a shrug tossed it aside impatiently and looked over at Mrs. Mainwaring.

That lady was poised on the extreme edge of her chair, as if for flight. Her lips were drawn down and compressed, while her eyes were fixed on a recalcitrant glove which she was tugging at with feverish efforts. The picture of injured dignity and offended feelings made it evident to Miss Teniel that as soon as the obstinate glove was fastened, the little lady would rise, make some sweeping remark intended to be ironical, and stiffly take her departure. Maud felt that the psychological moment had

arrived. It must be she herself who would break the uncomfortable silence which had risen between them. It would never do for Helen's mother to leave in such a frame of mind.

"Dear Mrs. Mainwaring," she began gently, appearing to examine her finger nails with great precision, but she paused, for she had not the courage to face those scornful eyes until she had succeeded in lessening their intensity.

How she was going on she hardly paused to consider. On the principle that neurasthenic patients should be treated with severity, she felt that Mrs. Mainwaring, though not in quite such a serious condition, must yet be treated with firmness and not spared, if any degree of success was to result; the treatment, if heroic, could do little harm, and might, Maud hoped, do a great deal of good.

She had paused in hesitation, trying to discover what the older woman's state of mind was and to guess to a certain extent the probabilities of success or failure, but the figures on the mental steam-gauge were indistinct, and Maud smiled indulgently as she continued speaking, at first somewhat at random.

"I want you to listen to me for a few minutes—no, don't interrupt me until I have finished."

Maud rose, and, drawing a chair beside Mrs. Mainwaring, took that lady's rather unwilling hand, held it firmly, and stroked it gently as she proceeded.

"In the first place, I love Helen dearly, and I am anxious that she should do what is best for her. Of course it would be so much more satisfactory if she could feel that a brilliant position in the world, which she might have for the asking, would be of greater advan-

tage than any other pursuit; but I am quite convinced that Helen, being no longer a child, should be freely allowed to choose for herself. We women do not often make mistakes, even though we act on the impulse of the moment. If you force her or refuse to make any reasonable concession, you will fail as surely as I am sitting here."

Miss Teniel paused long enough to draw aside her chair and face Mrs. Mainwaring, who had so far kept silence.

"I know you are anxious for Helen to make a great marriage, but there I warn you, and I know thoroughly what I am saying. You had better not meddle. Forgive the crudity of my words; and let me tell you that it will only be by the exercise of diplomacy that your mother-love will bend your daughter to your will."

Miss Teniel rose abruptly and walked over to the window.

Mrs. Mainwaring rose, smoothed out the folds of her dress, and walked over to where Maud was standing. Placing her hand with what Maud felt was an irritating touch upon her arm, Mrs. Mainwaring looked out in silence for the space of a few seconds.

"My dear, I have listened to you with a great deal of patience," said Mrs. Mainwaring brightly, "but I am not convinced that you are right—not at all. Of course we have been speaking with the privilege of old and intimate friends, and so I feel it incumbent upon me to say frankly and without reserve what I think. And now, my dear, I am going."

For several minutes after Mrs. Mainwaring had left, Maud felt the formal squeeze of the small hand and the vapid kiss she had received in parting, then, laughing

softly to herself as fragments of the recent conversation intruded themselves among her thoughts, she worked again over her accounts.

Later in the afternoon, after Helen had arrived and disappeared up-stairs, Miss Teniel was supremely glad of two things: first, that she had not told Mrs. Mainwaring that her daughter was expected for the night; and second, that she had kept Helen in ignorance of her mother's visit.

XVIII

HELEN found the journey to Laurence hotter and more tedious than ever. She was obliged to open the window, and on her arrival at the home felt fagged out. After a cup of tea, Maud suggested that she should lie down until dinner, but this Helen would not hear of. She protested that already she felt refreshed and would read until it was time for dinner.

"I must give you something for your cough, dear. How long have you had it?"

"Oh, a day or so," answered Helen listlessly.

"Well, go up now and lie down, please. You are overtired and excited."

"I really could n't, but I 'll go up and unpack. It 's the next room to yours, is n't it?"

Receiving an answer in the affirmative, Helen went up-stairs. She found her way to her room and removed the articles from her bag. In doing so she came across the book Stephen had given her, and when she had finished arranging her things, she sat down and began to read. Quite at random the book opened at a story called "The Dragon-fly." It was as follows:

A flood of silver moonbeams caressed the still face of the waters. The little waves, thus rudely awakened, fled in terror to the fancied security of a sandy beach nearby.

The coast rose abruptly. A little path wound upward until, reaching the summit of the steep incline, it bristled into the grim outline of a great castle around whose borders nestled the houses of a thriving town. Clouds obscured the brilliant light, and in the dark of the moon the huge mass stood out solidly against the sky, save where one tiny illumination shed a feeble

ray from an upper window. As the clouds sailed slowly by and the radiance of night returned, a woman was seen looking out into the night. It was the princess, who sat there motionless.

A glittering crown rested on her fair, wavy hair, which, unbound, fell loosely about her shoulders. Jewels, too, gleamed at her throat and wrists. A pale blue robe of velvet fell in severe lines, revealing indefinitely the curves of her slight figure. The eyes, which almost matched her dress, shone cold in the white light, while her face continued to wear its habitual haughty and impenetrable expression.

She was an enigma to her father's people, and it was rather by fear that she ruled her small court, who fawned, and flattered, or wrote impassioned verses to her, while they wondered what species of soul she kept hidden under the polished surface. There were some, indeed, who whispered that the heart of the princess was merely a lump of ice, and its sluggish beatings but the ebbless tide of a frozen sea. Certain it was that no one knew what her feelings were, nor had any suitor coming from over the wide seas been able to find favor in her sight.

One rejected love, so the rumor goes, is supposed to have openly told her before his departure that she was incapable of love, and to have cursed her below his breath. Another, unable to forego the resistless desire to win her, prophesied that love would come to her some day, but that day, destined to change the course of her life, seemed far away and distant. And so the years passed. Other lovers came and went, but the fair woman, when she deemed the interviews had lasted sufficiently long, dismissed them, saying she was fatigued, and by bending her graceful head made them see clearly that there was nothing for it but to leave her presence with the best grace possible.

Was it true, then, that she had no capacity to love? Her nature certainly did not respond to the warmth of passion, nor was there any desire, save a mere morbid curiosity, to comprehend its subtle meaning.

What had she heard of love philtres, of love charms? Were they infallible? She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. Her suitors had told her much in words full of passion which should have moved her to understanding, but the wild and, to her,

fragmentary sentences passed slowly but surely into some unknown kingdom whither she could not follow, and her heart beat not a jot the quicker. Perhaps it was really ice as they said, after all.

Thus pondering, she thought of a certain faithful lover and forgot his ungainliness, his lack of beauty, realizing for the first time that he had a mind worthy of respect. He had said it with conviction: "Love will come to you." Mufalda sighed, and then, drawing herself up, smiled superciliously.

So she gazed on, her face marble cold and her expression changeless as the rays of the moon, which bathed the quiet earth in splendor. The eyes were fixed, for their rapt expression betrayed how great was the concentration of her thoughts, as she continued to absorb the magic of the night.

A stray bat whirred by, blindly busy on aimless quest; an owl hooted and flew out into the glistening path of light with flapping of ghostly wings; but the Princess Mufalda heeded them not.

A light breeze ruffled the waters of the harbor, and the ships at anchor danced and strained gently, softly impelled by the mischievous zephyrs. The moon glinted through the slow-moving leaves of the tall trees, and the night was full of hope, of half-breathed promises, of love, and the presence of the Deity.

The rising wind moaned fitfully, and the moon passed again behind a dark cloud. Was there a storm brewing? She felt a sudden repulsion to all things created. It seared into the very core of her being, until the silver orb once more smiled forth clear and undefiled. Gazing upwards, the memory of the faithful Giovanni crept out insistently from some hidden recess of the brain and she frowned. There was a new light in her eyes, half veiled by the opposition of her strange nature, but the beautiful face remained unresponsive and cold.

She stretched out her arms appealingly, yet with a touch of the old imperiousness. Her mood changed. A prayer rose involuntarily from her breast. The wind had fallen. All was still in the soft night. Nature breathed audibly. Insects flew aimlessly by in the glistening rays, and a great peace, stealing out in the night, enveloped her in its tender embrace.

One insect larger than the rest caught her wandering attention. It was a dragon-fly with iridescent wings; its body glittered with a wonderful brilliancy. She watched its indecision, and reached out to grasp it. It eluded her, however, and circled off, only to return again and again. Ceasing at last her vain efforts to seize the delicate creature, she waited for it to come to her. Imagination, magic, vivid, palpitating, held her in its warm embrace.

"Love will come to you!" These words assumed a new meaning. The superstition of her race, strengthened by the weird beauty of the scene, for the time being held her enthralled. She wonderingly watched the dragon-fly sail in still smaller circles, scarcely daring to breathe.

When it veered to her direction she did not shrink, but waited as if fascinated to see what it would do next. She had ample opportunity to examine it, and saw, as it drew nearer, that a magnificent jewel, ruby-red, was embedded in the scales of its shining back. The essence of life, the joy of living, the embodiment of desire, the mysterious presence of love, were present and she felt in a measure their indefinable charm.

When the winged insect settled on her heart, instantly there took place a subtle change. The memory of her lover became at once of greater importance, and she marvelled at the enchantment which was taking place in the twinkling of an eye. It rested there but an instant, then rose and fluttered softly away, losing itself gradually in the limitless ether.

Mufalda woke from her reverie and tore feverishly at her draperies. She gazed at the spot where the dragon-fly had touched her. There on her fair skin was the mark of the jewel, standing out clear against its dead whiteness.

The stars shimmered in the bosom of the sea. The breeze, softly murmuring, made an unconscious accompaniment to the mad beating of her heart. No longer ice, no longer sluggish, it bounded with the strength born of that love which is the root of the beginning of all things created and living.

The princess, resting on the crest of a great, a new-born happiness, seemed transformed. Slowly she bent her proud head and for the first time in her life wept. Translated from the Persian, by A. M."

Helen closed the book reluctantly. It was a very short and poor translation, but the story though pretty was a trifle crude. She looked down at her hands which held the volume, and noticed that they were trembling. She coughed painfully. Perhaps she had caught more cold, for she remembered sitting by an open window in the train. A feeling of nervousness passed over her, and she rose and paced the room. The book slipped to the floor unnoticed. She paused at the window and looked out, but there was nothing to see, as it was already growing dark. What room was this she was in? The one next to Maud's, of course. She was at the Carrington Home. Why did she have to remind herself of that? There was something familiar about the room, though. Where had she seen it before? She coughed again for several minutes. Ah, she was uncomfortable and in pain, while the room was cold and cheerless. In a flash she knew it was the room that that woman and her child had died in. She worked her way shudderingly to the door, possessed with terror, and shivering convulsively. She clung to the jamb of the now open door, trying to call for help, but her voice sounded hoarse and unnatural; so she crept back and cowered miserably on the bed, a limp, colorless mass, gasping for breath and staring helplessly up at the white ceiling.

About half an hour later Maud entered the room with a lamp in her hand. The flushed face, the stertorous breathing, and the hacking cough told their own story. With a practised hand she put Helen to bed, and rang the bell. She drew up a chair and, sitting by her patient's bedside, waited. To the nurse who came, she explained the situation and asked that Miss Mainwaring's own physician and her mother be telephoned for. Helen's

temperature rose during the night, and Maud felt certain that the illness must be pneumonia. In walking across the room, her foot knocked against the book Helen had dropped. She picked it up, and, reading the name of Stephen Carrington on the fly-leaf, smiled rather ruefully, but had no chance then to examine it further. Later on, after the Doctor had left, Maud had a few minutes to read over the little love story which had held Helen's attention.

Towards the second morning Helen became more restless, and Maud, who was bending over her, saw the eyes of her patient staring at her without recognition. Mumbled words and phrases fell from the parched lips, while often laughter and sometimes tears disturbed the stillness of the sick chamber.

During the intervals of quiet Miss Teniel had snatches of repose, but she was under too much of a strain to allow herself to rest. Instead, her mind became more active, and she allowed her vigilance over her patient to relax while she thought of other things.

The striking similarity between the princess in the fairy tale and Helen was uncanny. A cry from the sick-bed aroused her. Helen was attempting to sit up. Maud pushed her back gently, and listened to the half intelligible words which fell from the parched lips: "How pretty it is! If I could only touch it!" Then again, "My heart is changed, it is no longer ice"—"Love has come to me."—"Lionel"—the weak voice hesitated —"Giovanni—no, it is—Stephen—I love;" then more confused murmurs.

The symptoms of the first two nights, bad as they seemed, were intensified during the days which followed, and for over a week Helen was in a critical state.

One day, however, the fever abated naturally, and finally her temperature became normal. She opened her eyes, and, seeing Maud smiling down on her, smiled back, feebly, falling almost immediately into a natural sleep.

Some days later, when Helen was convalescing, she asked Maud for the little book.

"It is bound in red," she said, "and I dimly remember having had it the day I was taken ill."

"Is this it?" asked Miss Teniel, producing the volume in question.

"Yes, that is it. Thank you," she said calmly, and, opening it, became intent upon its perusal.

Several times Maud seemed on the point of speaking, but evidently it was impossible to find suitable words to make a beginning.

When she had finished the story, Helen looked up and met Maud's eye.

"What day is this? How long have I been ill? What is the matter, Maud?"

"Do you want me to answer all three questions, dear?" answered the other, dropping her eyes and passing the chain of her watch idly through her fingers. "Well, then, this is Thursday, and you have been ill nearly three weeks. I am afraid to go on."

"Why?" asked Helen in surprise.

"Because, dear, I am—and that is why. Of course," continued Maud, "I know that is not a reason, but you have been very ill and——"

"I betrayed myself?" finished Helen quietly. "If I did, I suppose I must have been delirious. What did I say?"

"You quoted from that pretty story, 'The Dragon-fly,' several times——"

"You read it?" inquired Helen. "What did you think of it?"

Maud could not help smiling at Helen's palpable attempt at evasion.

"I thought you and the princess were much alike, and I could not help wishing—your story would end in the same way."

Helen was silent for a few minutes and looked away.

"And would it please you if it did?" she asked gravely, glancing up at the other. "I know it would, and I begin to think it would please me, too. It has come like—a self-revelation. Maud, I believe I love him. You see," she continued, "he is rather set in his ways, and I am afraid he will never come back. Where is he now? If you know his address, give it to me."

Maud walked to the window and looked out, while the letter was being written. Helen seemed to find some difficulty with it, for the sound of paper being torn reached the other's ears more than once. Maud smiled and waited, not daring to look round.

Miss Teniel could not help being amused at the mere suggestion of Stephen being described as set in his ways. The idea was manifestly absurd to one who knew him. A more gentle, soul could not be found, and he possessed a sweetness of character which made those who loved him forget how unattractive he was physically. How often had Maud heard people ask what it was a certain man and a certain woman saw in each other! Ah, there was the mystery of it all; there the momentous question. If ever it be answered, it will be by the mysterious Sphinx alone, in whose receptive breast is locked the secrets of the ages.

The most incomprehensible thing was that Helen was

evidently in love. It was wonderful; it was beautiful. Maud sighed deeply. Her paradise was of work, not love; but where the desire is, there, too, is the heart, and Maud was contented, unselfishly rejoicing in her friend's happiness.

She turned several times to look at Helen, and the last time she came forward quickly and kissed her.

"The letter is finished, Maud. I did not mean what I said just now. He will come because I am waiting for him. You may read it while I address the envelope. What did you say it was? Paris? He has gone abroad, then? Why?"

"To study music in Vienna. He waited to learn that you were out of danger. He will be in Paris a couple of weeks, then goes to Austria."

As she looked at Helen, Maud saw that her eyes were bright with the radiance of unshed tears.

"My dear Helen, you must not mind me. I didn't mean to be abrupt. Of course he will come. But you must be patient and try to get well for his sake."

Helen did not answer.

"I don't suppose we shall see you here much after you are married," Maud continued.

"No, I am afraid not," answered Helen dreamily. "I hope to go abroad next fall. Do you think he will like my letter?"

"I am sure he will," and Maud read it over again before she put it in its envelope. " 'Come back, my own, for love has come to me.' "

"You are a dear," said Maud, taking her gently in her arms and kissing her, "and I love you dearly."

"And I love you, too," answered the other softly.

"What," asked Helen after a pause, "do you suppose

ever became of Rose Barstow? No one seems to have heard anything about her since she went abroad."

"I don't know," replied Maud laconically. "I never took much stock in her. She had very advanced ideas."

And Helen could get nothing further from her on the subject.

XIX

IT is a curious fact that as in America Helen was waiting to hear from Stephen, in Homburg Rose was anxiously expecting news from Lionel.

As it was out of season, Miss Barstow had the little watering-place to herself for a while; later on, when it began to get crowded, she felt as if her privacy were being invaded.

"Have you heard about Lionel Carrington?" asked an acquaintance. "No? Well, I can't tell you about it, for it's too horrible, but I'll send you a copy of the paper. Don't return it to me. I have finished with it."

"Is he dead?" gasped Rose, feeling as if something tangible were slipping away from her.

"No," was the surprised answer, "but it would be better if he were."

When the paper arrived and she had read it, she cast it from her as if it hurt, and sat motionless and stunned, her face set and colorless.

It must be true, was her first coherent thought. She had suspected for some time that he was unprincipled, but that a degrading drug should be added to his other frailties made a tale of horror from which even she instinctively recoiled. Yet she loved him, and if he bade her come she would feel it her duty to go without counting the cost. But he did not write, and what could she do? Somewhere a helpless creature was wandering, struggling, but where? If she could only find him, it might be that she would be able to draw him back from the abyss, for to feel the support of another and stronger

personality might give him just the balance necessary. Religious scruples should have held her back, but love blinded her, making her insensible to present influences.

When she had received Lionel's letter begging her to come to him, the memory of the old days superseded the dull horror of the present, and her duty to the man she loved pointed unhesitatingly to the future.

Lionel's instructions were extremely explicit. She was to come alone. She knew his views, and if her love permitted, he would await her in Palermo on a certain day. This would give her a few days to rest in Paris. He recommended the " Luxe " from Paris to Naples—then to Reggio, and then the train from Messina to Palermo. He went on to say that he was living at a small place on the seashore near Acquasanta, and not far from Mondello, called Valdese. She sighed as she finished the letter. How well he understood her, and how unnecessary for him to request her not to write or wire!

The train from Paris was comparatively empty, and the journey passed like a dream until she reached Messina; then she awoke to the realization that only a step separated her from the fulfilment of her desire, the long-delayed meeting with her lover. How would it take place, and what would he say to her? She had pictured it a thousand times in imagination, but what would the real picture be?

She dozed through the night, and read the unaccustomed names dimly showing at the stations, deserted save by a sleepy porter or two. At dawn she awoke, blinking in the half-light. Drawing up the shade, she looked out of the window. This must be Palermo. Her heart beat fast as she collected her belongings and again sat down to peer out as the day broke. The train slowed

perceptibly and entered a station. She had reached her destination at last.

As she stepped from the train she glanced expectantly about her. She saw no signs of Lionel, and her heart sank. She resigned her bag to a porter, but stood there waiting, her dress held up lightly, her head thrust out in expectation, with a feeling of discouragement rising within her. Had she come so far to be cast aside? Already the meaning of her flight stood revealed, she had sinned by coming. But in a moment all was changed, for she caught a glimpse of him coming down the platform, peering in at the windows as he passed. She waited in silence, but as he drew nearer she changed color and a hot blush suffused her cheeks; then as he saw her and came forward more quickly the blood receded, leaving her white and trembling. She raised her eyes to his; her lips were tremulous and wistful. It was the supreme moment. She hesitated for a brief instant, and then, closing her eyes as he held her to him, gave her lips to his.

Rosamond sighed happily, and, with a new shyness, stole a glance at him as they walked along, his arm linked in hers. His face seemed older, and the eyes were dull and deep-set. But she looked at him through tears of happiness and disappointment, the former because that first kiss had sealed their love, the latter because he looked so ill. He was ill and needed her. Ah, she would nurse him back to health. Morphia should not stand in her way, and the strength of her love would dispel the power of its alluring fascination. A second glance at him satisfied her that he knew nothing of the fact of his story being known, while already relief that she had come so promptly softened the lines of pain in his care-worn face. He was not so demonstrative as she, but

when she had an opportunity of showing how much she belonged to him he would know then that a woman's love is not lightly given. She drew his arm insinuatingly tighter against her beating heart.

"I love you," she whispered. "Tell me my journey has not been in vain."

Rose saw a sudden light in his eyes, watched the white teeth part behind the full lips, caught the reflection of the sensual glow which illumined his face, and turned her eyes away, possessed by a spirit of coquetry which she could not resist. She made up her mind, however, that mere physical possession was not enough; it would not repay her for the sacrifice she had made. There must be a mingling of souls as well, to bring about a fuller and truer understanding.

Men are too apt to treat as a matter of course the sacrifices which women make. He should grasp to the full her reason for coming, and know that it was love and the need which it inspired in her to save him that had induced her to come. Which would be stronger, love or the drug?

After a hot cup of coffee in the dingy station restaurant, they set out on their drive, with Rose's trunk strapped on behind and her bag on the seat by the driver.

Both were more or less silent on the way out until they drew near to Valdese, instinctively feeling that it was not the moment for vapid conversation. A great sensation of peace enveloped her as they rumbled on, her hand lying in his, though her face was turned away to the smiling seas.

Their route from the Stazione Centrale lay along the broad Via Maqueda to the Porta of the same name; then a sharp turn to the right, by way of the Via Cavour,

past the Porta S. Giorgio, brought them into the wide Stradone del Borgo, now known as the Via Francesco Crispi. Lionel explained all this to her, but she merely nodded.

"This is the Piazza Ucciardone we are crossing," he said, "and now we turn off here into the Via del Molo. To the north is the shipbuilding yard—*cantiere* they call it—but you speak Italian. We are on the Via dell' Acquasanta now, and there is the English cemetery. We shall pass through Acquasanta presently. That mountain is Monte Pellegrino, and the castle at its base is La Favorita."

"It is beautiful," murmured Rose, pressing his hand, "and the sea is wonderful. Now I feel that we are leaving the world, dear, and for the future shall be free to exist for ourselves alone."

Rose was interested in the villa, and insisted on being shown over it from top to bottom. She expressed herself as delighted with everything.

"And we 're going to be happy, Lionel," she insisted wistfully.

"It's nice to have you, dear girl," he replied. "I've been very lonely, and I need—some one to look after me. I am not as strong as I was—but never mind. I only hope you won't be bored to death though. There 's nothing, absolutely nothing, to do."

"Don't worry about me," she said, looking up at him happily. "We'll make our own life, but don't think for one moment I regret coming. I suppose——" she laughed, "I am considered *déclassée* now, so I have nobody except you; but I want no one else."

After luncheon Rose confessed she felt tired.

"I shall rest a while," she said, and went to her room.

Their first real talk was on the terrace after dinner.

The moon was shining on the waters of the Bay of Mondello, and in *chaises longues* the two sat in silence, drinking in the mysterious beauty of the night.

"I am glad you are happy," replied Lionel softly, "and there are very few women I know—in our world, I mean—who would have been able to make up their minds to give up all and come out to a place of this kind. You are a good sort to have come, and I like you all the better for it."

"How little you understand me, to speak in that way!" she replied. "You seem to think it was hard for me to come. How little you know what a relief it all is! I don't care for the world's opinion, and as for religion, I suppose I ought to have some feeling, but I can't just now. Life at present is like a beautiful bubble, and I fear to do anything except exist, lest it burst. I want to dream on, alone with the thought that I love you. Do you know that not once since I came, have you told me that you love me, and I have been here already a whole day."

"Rose, old chap, you know I do love you. I don't understand how you can care for me, for I have done more evil than good in my time. Lately I am afraid to be alone. I dread the shadows, where ghosts lurk in their depths. You have come to love me, to take care of me, and you may be sure I shall love and cherish you as long as my strength lasts. I am ill in mind and wretched in body, and that is why I say it was d—d white of you to come. Why, dear, it means a new lease of life, and strength to resist——"

"Don't go on," pleaded Rose, laying her cool hand on his. "Remember only that I love you, and instinctively I shall know all. I am here to be your right hand, your guide, your will."

"Don't speak of will," he begged. "I have no will. I am but the slave of a drug, and I cannot resist it."

"Hush!" exclaimed Rose, with gentle accents of authority, "I know all about it. Don't ask me how, but I have known it for some time. Try, dear one, to remember you are no longer opposed to a foe single-handed. I am here to be your will, and—I love you."

Lionel, whose face had been working strangely whilst he clasped and unclasped his hands nervously, at these words pulled himself together by an effort.

"By Jove! do you mean it?" he gasped. "Then by all the saints we shall win. Ah, Rose, you have not the faintest conception of what this temptation is. I take my dose—then follows happiness such as you have no idea of. It is Paradise that I enter. While there I revel in delights of Muhammud's Heaven, and leaving it I suffer the pangs of Hell."

"These are not the thoughts for such a night, my Lionel," exclaimed Rose, rising and stretching forth her arms languorously—then clasping them behind her head —as she stood with her back to the moon and the restless sea, looking down at him.

"Come, let us stroll along the terrace. It is too lovely," she said, turning impulsively towards the sea. "You know," she continued musingly, "I sometimes feel the sea is calling me."

"The sea, little woman, is the voice of God," announced Lionel gravely, as he rose, too, and stood by her side. "It is calling us to seek peace in its bosom, but something holds us back. We love life too much, and midst its pleasures and pain we live on without thought of the morrow."

"That is very pretty, dear, but for my part I can live only in the present."

"And yet," protested Lionel, as they walked along slowly, "how many of us would do the things we do if we stopped to consider them? Would you have come to me if you had thought it over seriously first?"

"Yes," she replied, without hesitation; "I should."

He was silent, and, as if by common consent, they both paused, looking absently out over the dancing waters.

"All this is very interesting but I am going to bed," said Lionel, stretching with enjoyment and freedom. "You had better come, too. Remember we are married to the world."

"Even if we are not to ourselves," laughed Rose. "A wife in name only! Why, Lionel, you foolish boy, do you flatter yourself the servants don't know? Nonsense!"

After he had disappeared Rose pursued her slow course along the terrace. She was walking deliberately, apparently as if trying to avoid stepping on the lines of intersection of the blocks with which the terrace was laid.

Was it too late to draw back? Alas, it was no question of crossing the Rubicon; for her the die was already cast. She turned with suddenness to the house, glowing in silver moonlight, where all the windows were darkened save one, and that belonged to her lover. With a low laugh she sped along, and paused when she stood within the shaft of yellow light, shining garishly on the tessellated pavement. A moment's hesitation, then she deliberately pushed the long French window open and went in, letting it close softly behind her.

XX

AS the days and weeks passed, Rose noticed a decided improvement in Lionel. The drug was more under control, and she even induced him to moderate it slightly on several occasions.

Once, however, she entered the room as he was about to administer it. The syringe was in his hand, the needle near his arm, and he was on the point of making the subcutaneous injection. He started as he saw her; then, with a shrug of his shoulders, as if accepting the inevitable, he finished his task, and sank down on a comfortable chair to enjoy his debauch.

From that day began the history of his downfall, and Rose was forced to acknowledge that the headway she had gained could now only be counted as so much loss. Up to that moment, his love for her had been in the ascendant, but when he had once shown her that he had lost his self-respect, he became indifferent and began to lose his power of resistance.

Some three months had passed since she came to Valdese, and she had lived from day to day like one in a dream. But now, in the face of failure, she paused to confront the situation as it actually existed. She had wilfully put aside all responsibility, accepting the routine of her daily existence.

Now in these first days of September, with Lionel ill and unable to leave his room, irritable and unreasonable, she was compelled to accept defeat. That he no longer loved her, or even thought of her except at rare intervals, she knew only too well. Thus it was inevitable that she should look back on her life with regret, feel-

ing only the satisfaction that she had done her duty according to her lights. Her mind at last dwelt on religion. From that standpoint her conduct looked black, but, hard as it was, she must go on to the end, and accept the indignity of her position as a punishment. She had no power to look beyond, for while he lived she must love him, not with the first blush of passion, but rather from a dead sense of duty, like a weary task as yet unfinished.

In this state of mind she turned to her church for comfort and advice. It was not so much that she needed the advice, for she knew that the very words she would hear would be but the echo of the promptings of her own awakening conscience. Alas, the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak, she admitted with a bitter smile.

The Doctor had warned her of the extreme gravity of the case. A shock would kill Lionel, or perhaps a larger dose of the drug—but she must go to Palermo.

He was sitting huddled in an arm-chair, pale and nervous, when she entered his room.

"I am going to town," she said. "I stopped to find out if I could do anything for you there."

Ostensibly she was going to make some purchases, but her true object was to see her priest. She had not been to confession for a long time. She merely mentioned to Lionel casually that she might be passing the post-office.

"Post-office!" he cried. "Then just drop this letter in the box for me. Don't forget about it, for it is important."

"I will not forget," she said listlessly, taking the bulky letter from him and depositing it in her bag.

She walked slowly to the door, paused irresolutely, and, seeing that his nervous irritability was increasing, left the room. She listened at the door and heard him

making his way painfully and slowly about the room, mumbling and cursing as he did so. She sighed, and made her way across the garden, going in the direction of Acquasanta. Once in the tram, she glanced over a letter she had written to a certain Sister Gabriella. It was addressed to a convent in Rome. In it she sent her love and the hope that some day she might come to them to gain that peace which the world cannot give.

A tear dropped on Rose's ungloved hand, but she straightened herself with dignity. It was no time for emotion, she must still endure. It was part and parcel of her punishment. Her love for him was dying at last, but her morbid sense of duty still prevented her from leaving him to his fate.

Her commissions in Palermo were soon finished, and as it was Friday she turned into the cathedral to await her turn to confess. Several people were walking about, but Miss Barstow took a seat in one of the side pews near the confessional, from time to time glancing in its direction.

The church was becoming deserted. It was her turn now, so she rose and glided forward, sinking to her knees as she pressed her face against the cool grating.

"I have come for help. Save me from myself."

It was the cry of a soul in pain, but the priest waited to hear more before he spoke.

"Speak, my daughter, tell me all," he said after a pause.

The gentleness of the voice reassured Rose, but it did not serve to make her confession easier.

"I have sinned, father," and again came the reiteration of that curious phrase, "save me from myself."

It was not a mere empty prayer, but seemed rather an appeal for mercy, and Rosamond's voice was so hard

that it assumed almost the character of a right presupposed to be her due.

"I do not understand. I cannot hear your confession unless you are willing to explain to me more fully your trouble."

"Father, I have sinned the great sin."

"Has he deserted you?"

" No," she replied wearily; "it is not that. I wish to leave him, but I have not the courage to do so."

"That is wrong. He should marry you, or you must leave him and repent you of your sin."

"I cannot leave him. He is dying, and I love him," she murmured half intelligibly.

"It is sinful to love him, for such love is naked and unashamed."

"It is my duty to help him until he dies."

"Your duty is to God, and not to man. Man is the vessel of God. You are defiled. You must be clean before you can appeal for help. My daughter, there is no half-way course."

"Listen, father, and I will tell you all. I have loved him for many years. He is a slave to morphia, and he is dying, as I have said."

"But you have been living in sin with him, and your intimacy must cease."

"You cannot understand. I know the way I must go, but I have no strength to take me along it. Tell me some other way. How can I leave him to die alone?"

"The Church does not concern itself with motives. The facts are plain. You *must* leave him."

"I cannot! God help me, I cannot!"

"Go, then, my daughter. When you have cast out sin come to me, and I shall willingly hear your confession."

Miss Barstow rose wearily. She made her way to a seat and sat down. She was shaken, but must think it all over. There must be some other way. If he died, of course her task was finished. Ah, it was horrible to have lived such a life, but the love she had given had blinded her to the horror of it. What if he did not love her now, what if he were willing to thrust her aside, was that reason enough to kill her love outright? What a cruel question! Her love, once given, was not so ephemeral, she insisted stubbornly; yet she knew in her heart that her position was impossible and her argument futile, for it was based on a false hypothesis. She prayed long that strength might be given her to do right, and rose at last from her knees refreshed. As long as love for the man or love for her duty—and the two seemed indissoluble—existed, she must remain blind. It was impossible to repent until sin was thrust away, and that was impossible until Death removed the man.

Lionel knew that he had been increasing his daily dose of morphia lately, until he could not be certain what amount he was taking. If he had the moral courage to stop and consider what he was doing, he would have realized that he was going steadily downhill. Lately his nerves had been racked to such an extent that he was fast approaching a state of collapse, save when under the influence of the narcotic. He did not know how serious this was, because now he has lost all power of resistance. He slept a little, dozing off for a time, to awake from some hideous dream trembling from fright and horror.

This very morning he had been more than usually sharp with Rose, whom he unconsciously still felt the need of, even if he did not actually love her. In his

nervous and depressed state he could not be aware of her patience and unselfishness, of her love, which he was doing his best to kill, nor of her many thoughts of him, and the thousand and one ways in which she saw to his comfort. She did things for him, things in themselves almost intangible and perhaps hardly noticeable, to which he had become so used that he felt the need of them; and, were they withdrawn, he would have vaguely wondered what was the matter.

After Rose had left, he immediately began to miss her. He wanted his pipe, but was not certain where it was, and he hated the exertion of trying to find it. A violent explosion of anger followed his efforts, and at last he found it in one of the drawers of his desk. There was very little tobacco left, hardly a pipeful, and he grumbled at that; then he set about to find a match to light his pipe with. When at last he came across an old box with three matches in it, he wasted two of them, but with the third he was partially successful. After several puffs he found the pipe was not drawing, and with an oath he threw it violently into a corner of the room, where it broke into a thousand pieces. The morning passed somehow, and at noon the servant brought in a tray with a tempting luncheon spread on it. Lionel picked at some of it, played with the rest, and in the interval gulped down almost a quart of strong Sicilian red wine. For the moment he felt stronger, and dozed off, but woke with a sudden start, as in imagination he fancied that some rabid animal was gnawing at his vitals.

"Where is the morphia?" he gasped. "I must have some. I have not touched it to-day;" and he rose to cross the room with arms and hands stretched out before him, as if suddenly blinded.

"Give it to me!" he screamed in anger, and suddenly

found himself holding the syringe and bottle in his hand. At this he shuddered, broke into a cold perspiration, and tottered back to his chair.

Suddenly he sat up and glared into vacancy. There was something he wanted. What was it? He spoke the words aloud. In the corners jeering voices, so it seemed, answered him. He was frightened. He was going mad. What was it he wanted? He repeated the words aloud, but softly this time, lest he should disturb the voices of the watchful demons. The morphia—where was it? In his hand. He laughed feebly. His very strength seemed slipping from him.

He relaxed and lay with closed eyes, whose lids twitched nervously. Suddenly he started up again and mechanically slipped the bottle of morphia tablets and the syringe into his pocket. He seemed somehow to have forgotten about them, for his action was totally unconscious. He rose unsteadily to his feet and made his way to the window, where he gazed out, blinking at the white sunlight. With an air of suspicion, he returned to his seat and peered about him, staring into the corners or looking over his shoulder, as if he expected to see some gibbering spectre ready to snatch at him. Then for some unexplained reason, tears rolled down his haggard cheeks, welling out of the deep-set eyes, with the dull light shining from their minute pupils. His emaciated fingers twitched nervously. He was a pitiable object, ready to start at his own shadow.

Just as unexpectedly his hand felt in the loose pocket of his dressing-gown where he had thrust the bottle and syringe, and he drew forth the two friends, gazing at them lovingly. He held them against his cheek; he fondled them, and spoke softly to both as he pressed them longingly to his lips. With shaking hand he prepared

and filled the syringe, then pushed back the sleeve of the loose dressing gown he was wearing. A new light jumped to his eye, and he drew a long, shuddering breath of anticipation. A light breeze rose, and the French window blew open. Lionel looked up startled. A man stood in the opening.

"Giuseppe Marlino!" he shrieked, and the bottle, with the filled syringe, fell with a crash to the floor.

Marlino, forgetting the orders of the society, and possessed by feelings of revenge alone, sprang forward and drew a long knife from his boot. He raised it once and buried it swiftly in the resisting figure, which sank back moaning.

With an ugly laugh the assassin fled again to the open, while his victim, ashen, gasping for breath, clutched wildly at the folds of his dressing-gown.

In the room Marlino had left but a short time since it had grown suddenly quiet, save for the regular ticking of the clock, and the huddled figure in the chair now staring with sightless eyes on the smiling scene without.

XXI

ABOUT a week after her conversation with Maud, Helen left the hospital and once more moved back to town. She prevailed upon her mother to delay making plans for the summer, pleading that she was not yet strong enough to take a long journey. She was waiting anxiously to hear from Stephen, and her impatience was very natural.

From the moment of sending the letter, she had not felt at ease, but had attributed this to a desire to have Stephen come and have the matter decided.

At the end of a day after her return, she critically reviewed the whole situation. Had she been wise in deciding so quickly? It was a serious question, too momentous to be disposed of so rapidly. Of course there was not much doubt that she was in love, but there should be no shadow of question about it. On such a decision depended the happiness of them both. Why had she not taken this aspect of the matter before? Why had she been in such haste to write that letter? Why had she felt it necessary, in the state of weakness that she was then in, to dash off a message of such moment? Her mind had been full of the story she had been reading, being abnormally sensitive and receptive, and she had flown quickly to the conclusion that she and the princess must have the same fate. Was she in love, actually, really in love, or was her state of mind merely the result of a highly sensitized imagination? It was cruel that such questions should arise, and that doubts should assail her now, when she was actually awaiting the arrival of her lover? Ought she not to be free of all

doubt, with her mind at rest and her heart filled with a sweet expectancy? Of course it was all wrong, but it was better to fight down this feeling now than wait and discuss it with him later. He would not understand, for he was coming for a definite answer, and that answer must inevitably fit in with the tone of her letter. Was she prepared to give him that answer; and, if so, why not at once and without reservation? He would not, as a matter of fact, permit discussion. He was coming, not to sue, not to ask for favors, but to receive, with the air of a conqueror, the crown she should be prepared to place on his head. Helen sighed. It was like being on the horns of a dilemma, and if she could not see her duty soon she would be forced to capitulate.

She consoled herself by saying that she was worrying needlessly over a state of affairs, doubtless due to a morbid condition of mind. No doubt lots of women went through the same self-communion, the same doubts beset them, and they dismissed them as easily as she would the question which haunted her. If she felt certain that she would be able to answer it in a day or so, her mind would have been more at rest, and she would have put her perturbation down merely to nervousness at the prospect of meeting her lover again, not to the gravity of the decision she was called upon to make. But it went deeper than that, and she knew it. She knew, furthermore, that she could not confront him, at the present moment, without a qualm. At the thought, a faint feeling of that former unreasonable repulsion returned, but she was immediately ashamed and sought to overcome it. Deep down in her heart she felt that love was struggling to free itself from a network of indecision. These were treacherous waters, yet

she could not resist trying to sound their depths, and by so doing set at rest this strange uneasiness.

In the meantime, something must be done to prevent Stephen from coming home. She could not see him yet. That was final. She must beg for time, and if he loved her he would understand and give passive help to a decision. Would she have time to write? No, she feared not. In the end she sent a cablegram, as being the wisest and quickest means of communication. Her message merely said not to come now, but to await her letter.

She wrote him not to misjudge her motives, not to question them, but just to accept her present decision. She could not receive him yet, and she was going away. Her mother would go with her, and he must not try to seek them. If he loved her, he would let her do what she wanted freely. She would be in Rome in October. Would he come to her then? There were some things which were not clear to her, and she must rid her mind of all cobwebs before they met. It was a long time to ask him to wait, but she could not shorten the period of probation. "Wait until we meet in October," she pleaded.

Stephen's answer was short. His wire read merely, "Rome, October."

The letter which Helen received later was also concise. It did not express surprise, but simply said that he did not understand, but, hard as it would be, he would wait. The last sentence touched her in spite of herself, for it was so simple: "I shall always love you, whatever happens." It was capable of two meanings, either expressing complete trust in her to bring about a happy termination of the present condition of affairs, or—and there was an indefinable ring of fatality about this other

viewpoint—he accepted with meekness of spirit the contrary result.

Helen was seated at the desk in her morning-room when Stephen's letter was handed to her, and after reading it she remained for some time in deep thought.

The one conclusion she came to was that, under the circumstances, it would not have been advisable for her to have acted differently. The words of her maid recurred to her with startling clearness, and she knew she could not give herself to any man unless she loved him. Was this a tacit admission that she was not in love with Stephen? Helen sighed deeply, for she was unable to consider such a question in cold blood, but must perforce stubbornly put it aside for the present.

What ingredients were necessary to love, and what superfluous? If the question had been asked in other days, no words would have been necessary to describe the serene lives of our ancestors, for actions speak louder than words, and each life would have spoken for itself. But now marriage and the union of lovers were more complex, and Helen could not bring herself to venture out beyond her depth just yet.

There is always something mysterious about what we do not understand, and Helen felt a strange lack of desire to attempt to do so at present. Various thoughts flitted through her busy brain—parts of phrases, and fragments of scenes more or less vital; but the question as to which element, that of failure or success, would result in Stephen's case, remained unanswered.

"I shall always love you, whatever happens." Poor Stephen! She felt more than sorry for him, and pity, she remembered, is akin to love. Did she, after all, love him?

Under the influence of the moment, Helen buried her

face in her arms; or, rather, unconsciously she allowed her head to drop until the face, still pale and wan from her recent illness, lay hidden in the protecting circle which ended in her clasped hands. When she at last raised it and looked straight before her, her eyes peered solemnly as at some familiar though unrecognized object, like a near-sighted person. The mouth, drawn into a tremulous curve of sweetness, changed suddenly to a straighter one of firmness; and at this moment a shadowy likeness to her mother passed over her face. Was it in the narrowed eyes, in the raising of the delicately pencilled eyebrows, in the slightly compressed nostrils, or perhaps in the rather scornful turn of the graceful head; or, did it show in the obstinate line of the pale lips? Who can say? But before the space of a moment had passed it was gone. The eyes opened wider, but strained as if in pain; the head dropped just a shade, and the lips relaxed. It was as if the sun were struggling to free itself from persistent clouds, and the girl's whole expression changed. It was wistful, but tinged with an indefinable regret and the darker shadow of a desire unattained. The burning memory of the insult, offered by a man she had learned to respect and trust, once more attempted to sear and scorch her with its perilous flame; even now she shrank from its deadly touch, even as in bitterness she held herself erect. But—she had not cared then, and—she flung out her decision as if in defiance—she did not care now.

It was the more vivid days of her life at the hospital which now rose before her, when she had worked there under the tutelage of one whose heart had been in his work, and who then appeared as a very different character from what he subsequently proved himself to be. But she had not cared, so why dwell on the unfortunate

incident which had left her the same woman, unchanged and indifferent?

She forced her thoughts into another channel and thought with tenderness of Maud and her devotion. Maud's life-work was laid out for her and there was no one to gainsay her. Her thought reverted to her mother, from whom she had been too long separated in interest, and she must make an effort to bring about a closer tie between them. Perhaps her marriage to Stephen would do this; and perhaps, too, now that his brother was removed from the scene of action, he would not object to her going to the hospital occasionally.

Where was Lionel though, who had been forced to throw away the only real interest he had seemed to have, what was he doing, and what would become of him? With an effort she dismissed this thought, for she had not cared, and she did not care now. Her mind returned to thoughts of Stephen, and she knit her brows in perplexity and trouble.

A ring at the telephone caused her to look up. She rose quickly and took off the receiver.

"Hello? Is that Miss Mainwaring?"

"Yes, I am Miss Mainwaring. Who is it?"

"Oh, is that you, Helen? I did not recognize your voice. This is Maud. I just called up to see how you were."

"Thank you, I am getting on fairly well, but I can't do much yet."

"I suppose not. You ought to go slowly, but I don't believe you need much advice there. How do you sleep? Better I hope."

"No, I don't. Maud?"

"Yes, dear; what is it?"

"Something is troubling me. I wish you could help me to quiet my mind. I am so nervous. I wish——"

"What do you wish?"

"I don't know. Oh, Maud, I can't marry Stephen—yet."

"Why not, dear? What is the matter? Don't you love him?"

"I don't know my own mind. That is where the shoe pinches. How am I to tell whether I love him or not?"

"Don't be a goose, Helen. I am sure you love him."

"I wish I knew."

"What are you going to do? After your letter, you have no right to——"

"I know, but I have cabled him not to try to see me now. I shall give him his answer as soon as I know my own mind. Am I acting very strangely?"

"No, I suppose not; but, Helen, I gather that you have written him again. What does he say?"

"He agrees. He has acted like a trump. I wish I were certain whether I loved him or not. I don't believe I do, or else I would be certain; but still, I cannot get him out of my thoughts. What do you think?"

"I hardly know, dear. It 's all so confused. Please tell me what you decide to do, and don't be rash. He is a good man, and good men are scarce. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," and Helen mechanically hung up the receiver.

She rose wearily from her seat, and made her way listlessly to the desk, and sank there feeling dull and low-spirited.

A light knock at the door roused her, and she half rose as her mother entered, but reseated herself as the older woman came forward.

"You look pale, Helen dear. I must ask Dr. James what he advises."

"Dear mother, I don't want to see a doctor. I am perfectly well."

Mrs. Mainwaring noted the querulousness in Helen's tone, but did not argue with her. She seated herself and looked quietly down at her hands.

Meanwhile Helen was unconsciously moving the objects about which littered her desk.

"Perhaps a change of air or a change of scene would do you good, but I hardly like to act without the doctor's advice. I think you would be better off here for the present, after all. After your illness, you are of course weak and nervous.

"Please, mother, do not send for that stupid old doctor, but take me away—away from all this," and Helen waved her hand comprehensively about.

Mrs. Mainwaring, however, remained obdurate, and it was only after considerable difficulty that Helen at last persuaded her to take her abroad.

"We 've seen so little of each other," she pleaded, kneeling at the older woman's knee, "and it would be a good thing for us to try and understand each other better. I know it has been my fault, and I will try to be reasonable. I am still so nervous and tired that I feel as if the change would do me good. Bear with me, dear. Don't try to cross me, for I could not endure it. Let us go, and make no plans. We shall just drift, and not allow anything to trouble us."

So it was that the two ladies, with their maids, started off on their journey, the journey which was to be full of so much for them both.

XXII

HELEN was so much rested by her quiet trip across the ocean that Mrs. Mainwaring decided to go as soon as possible to Versailles, to complete the improvement already begun. Consequently, a little more than a week after their departure from New York, the two ladies were engaged in making themselves comfortable, for a stay of several weeks at the Hôtel des Reservoirs. The sad memories of the olden days of Versailles were, thought Mrs. Mainwaring, intended as a lesson for the somewhat heedless gayeties of the present. Still, the good lady, who was nothing if not inconsistent, adored the world, lived only in it, and was more often guilty than not of hero-worship, that worship of the great which is as the breath of their nostrils to the members of that wonderful circle called Society.

If, however, she had not felt really alarmed by her daughter's late illness, nothing would have induced her to bury herself in this little village, even with its proximity to the most beautiful park in the world, and full as it was of such deep historical interest.

Helen and her mother wandered through the galleries of the castle, which were filled with so many objects of interest; but best of all the girl loved to stroll along the alleys of the vast enclosure, or glance over a book, often letting the volume rest on her lap unread, and giving herself up to idle day-dreams.

Often when whiling away the hours alone, she thought of Stephen, but always with sadness, and never with longing or peace. As the days went on, the question as to what she had better do beat on her heart with

pitiless insistence, and she dreaded more and more the necessity of having to answer; yet the obsession which the burden of this decision caused her became finally more than she could bear. At last, being unable to close her eyes to its clamor, she forced herself to face the question; and, knowing now that she did not love him and never could, she straightway wrote him to that effect, preferring that the blow should fall now rather than that he should have to bear any longer the cruel doubt of waiting.

When the letter was finally posted, she felt relieved, as if a weight had been lifted from her heart, but still it did not beat with that lightness which betokened a healthy reaction, and she wondered. It was as if there still lurked another incubus which stilled its joyousness and pressed with a dull weight upon her restless spirit.

She determined to persuade her mother to move to some other and totally different spot, far from the associations connected with her decision, where she could breathe a new and rarer atmosphere.

When she joined her mother at luncheon that day, Mrs. Mainwaring handed her a letter from Mrs. Van Alstyne.

"Read that, dear, and tell me what to say. I wish to send an answer as soon as possible."

Helen read over the letter while they waited for the meal to be served, and learned that Mrs. Van Alstyne was sailing for Cherbourg on the seventh of June, and hoped they would not mind joining her at the Italian lakes, where she was going as soon as she could get there. She was to be at the Hotel de L'Europe at Cadenabbia and would order their rooms for them if they wrote her on the arrival of her steamer, the Kronprinz. She went on to say that Maud had given her letters to one or two pleasant people at Cadenabbia, and among them

one to Lady Santley, Maud's elder sister. "Your names have been included, too," she added, "so you see you will have to come, and I shall take no denial. I hope Helen is better. Do give her my love, and tell her how glad I shall be to see her."

"Well, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Mainwaring impatiently, as she watched Helen fold the letter and replace it with quiet deliberation in its envelope, "what do you think?"

"I don't much care where we go, mother, but I am tired of it here. Let us go to Cadenabbia, if you want to."

"You don't seem very enthusiastic," said Mrs. Mainwaring, smiling indulgently, "but I suppose we might as well go there. *Garçon, apportez du pain.* I would n't mind saying yes finally, if only Tessie Van Alstyne was n't so masterful—sometimes aggressively so!"

"Now, mother, I won't have my friend attacked. I like her, and I hope you will answer her letter in the affirmative, and make it cordial."

"Helen my dear, sometimes you seem to forget that I am your mother. But there! I don't want to quarrel, because I must have a little talk with you after *déjeuner* —how easy it is to fall into French expressions?. I always thought it so affected until I spent some time abroad with you, after your dear father died."

"Very well, mother," responded Helen indifferently. "What is coming now?"

"Some *poulet casserole,* a salad, and some of that fruit which I think must have been saved from the Ark."

"Perhaps so, but I am not hungry to-day. One gets so weary of hotel food."

Some half an hour later the two ladies finished their

coffee, and Mrs. Mainwaring, rising, asked Helen to come to the sitting-room.

Mrs. Mainwaring had an invariable habit of looking down at her hands, which she held folded in her lap before she spoke, and it always irritated Helen; so as on this occasion her mother sat thus for a longer time than usual, the girl became impatient and at last could stand it no longer. Leaning forward, she said:—

"What is it, mother? What do you wish to say to me?"

"I have a good deal to say, my dear," began her mother, a faint color flushing her usually pale face, "and I must beg you to listen attentively. Of course I have been bitterly disappointed that you have not taken more of a real interest in the world—don't interrupt me yet, but listen in patience until you hear what I have to say. You have gone out in a perfunctory, half-hearted way, and not as if you cared for it in the least; it seemed as if it were merely an unpleasant duty, and you appeared glad when the dinner, reception, ball, or whatever form the entertainment took, was over. Your work at the hospital, too, I have watched—oh I keep my eyes open, you see—and you go about that in what I should call an hysterically business-like way, as if you were not quite sure whether your interest in it would last. If, on the other hand, you are really in earnest, I should have no objection to such work, providing you did not entirely lose touch with the world of society you were born to shine in. You, my dear, are *of* the best society and not merely *in* it, as some others are. You must never forget that. I feel less opposed to your work at the Carrigton Home now that that arch fiend Lionel Carrington is gone, but——"

"Mother," interposed Helen quietly, "would it not be

better to leave Mr. Carrington's name out of the conversation? He has gone from—us, from our—lives, so why not leave him alone? Besides, Lionel Carrington at the hospital was one man, while outside of it he was—different. The home, which he loved, might have saved him; but the other—the devil was the stronger. We should rather love our enemies, and he was an enemy because he did evil to all, except when under the influence of the home."

"Are you defending him, my dear? It must, then, be worse than I feared."

"No, I am neither defending him nor his life, but I am giving the devil his due," she answered boldly.

Helen looked steadily at her mother as she spoke, her face appearing pale in comparison with the flush of excitement which now tinged Mrs. Mainwaring's high cheek-bones; but it was the older woman's eyes which fell first allowing her glance to fall on the hands which were once more folded in her lap.

"Is that all, mother? Is there nothing else you wish to say?"

Mrs. Mainwaring looked up quickly, for she was struck by the tone of Helen's voice, which seemed to be too quiet to be natural. She attempted to soften her own to her daughter's tone, and even to force a faint smile, so that her eyes might look benignly on the girl, as on one who should be pitied rather than blamed.

"No, my dear, I am not finished yet, but I soon will be. What I have just been saying is only an interlude, as the dramatists call it. Your moonshine is over, is n't it?"

"It is not over, because it never began," said Helen defiantly, misunderstanding the meaning her mother evidently wished to convey.

"Thank God! child, unless you are deceiving yourself."

Mrs. Mainwaring had been merely coquetting with the subject, never dreaming how near she had been to the truth, and now she settled herself complacently in her chair and smiled more easily.

"Helen," she said appealingly.

"Yes, mother," answered Helen wearily.

"Helen, I have not been dreaming all this winter, as you supposed, and the result of my observations can be summed up in one question: will you for one year devote yourself exclusively to the world? If at the end of that time you find you cannot live in it in happiness, why, then I shall accept the inevitable, and you may do what you please. You see I am bargaining with you. It is a compromise. Will you accept it?"

"Yes," answered Helen promptly; "I shall, both in the spirit and the letter." And in an instant she felt relieved as if of a burden.

"I am so glad, my dear; I know it will be for your happiness, and you will make me happy by doing what I desire. Do you promise not to give any of your interest or time to the Carrington Home during that time, so that the coming year shall belong to me and to the world?"

"I promise," responded Helen simply, though her voice was not vested with the solemnity of an oath. "Now I am going out."

"Before you go," said Mrs. Mainwaring, puzzled by the girl's passive obedience, and scarcely knowing whether the fruits of victory belonged to her or not—"before you go, I wish to say that I shall accept Mrs. Van Alstyne's suggestion and write to her to-day, unless you don't care to go after all."

"I should love to go," answered Helen, with an almost real assumption of sincerity. "That will be part of the pleasure I shall be expected to extract from the world. Don't forget that I am going to be really worldly —for a year."

As Helen left the room she laughed lightly, but Mrs. Mainwaring shivered as she heard it, without realizing that the curious hollow sound covered a sense of loneliness; for it is often easier to laugh than to weep one's heart out. And Helen did not know why she felt a strange gnawing at her heart, unconsciously deadening it in her desire to carry out faithfully her mother's wish.

Slowly she took up the threads of this new life and diligently started to weave the intricate design which represented duty, daintily piling up on the steel needles of her daily life the stitches which represented pleasure, and toiling to make them coincide with the pattern she had been given to knit.

Helen had a will of her own, and she did not intend to accept defeat with patience; if she were forced to acknowledge herself beaten at the end of the period of probation, she would hide the knowledge from her mother, or at least soften the blow as much as possible. She had admitted that the fault had been largely hers, and she would atone for its commission by a faithful performance of her promise.

At last the routine of her duty became second-nature to her; and she could smile, talk gaily, and enact her part with ease, mixed with a very fair amount of increasing enjoyment. In other words, a new Helen emerged into the glare of the lime-light, appearing like a butterfly full-fledged from its chrysalis, flitting from flower to flower, in easy, inconsequent fashion, light-

hearted, gay, and débonair, if the outer shell is any indication of the soul, the spirit, within. And thus she set about arranging her life for the penance of the coming year.

If, as time went on, the girl had moments of despair, times when the weight at her heart-strings seemed about to drag her earthward, the mother, who was closely watching, could detect no signs of it, no indications that the girl was anything but happy; and she praised herself for her sagacity, feeling in her heart that it was all her own work. Poor, deluded mother! What would your feelings be if you knew how the daughter's heart often ached, filled to overflowing with vague yearning for some unknown desire; how weary to death she often became, how endless the days and the nights, when dinners, plays, or both filled the gay visit to nearby Paris?

Both ladies thought nothing of the trip to town. It was like living on the outer edge of a great city, and much more quiet than being actually in the midst of the throbbing, noisy metropolis, as Mrs. Mainwaring often said with a smile, and Helen smiled bravely, too.

When the question of the trip down to the south, with its objective point the Italian lakes, was discussed, it was Helen who suggested a motor trip, almost deciding herself the route and choosing the points to stop off at, where the greater part of the gay and careless pleasure-seekers were to be found.

"We must go to Aix, for the Brewsters are there," she said gaily; "and then go south again by slow stages, so as to enjoy it thoroughly."

"That will be delightful, my dear, but we must give Tessie some idea when to expect us," objected Mrs. Mainwaring unwisely.

"Now, mother," pouted Helen, "don't let us be prac-

tical. That would spoil the trip. You can write Mrs. Van Alstyne from Aix, and then we can send telegrams from time to time, telling her where we are."

"Just as you say, Helen," assented her mother. "But I know she will want to know about the rooms——"

"Oh, bother rooms!" exclaimed Helen pettishly, but with an observant eye on the older woman's face, watching carefully what it indicated. "I do wish you would let those sordid questions alone. Why can't we drift—just drift?"

The trip took place as arranged, for Mrs. Mainwaring was too overcome by the manner in which events were shaping themselves to interfere. Success seemed to be pouring forth from a horn of plenty in a measure full to overflowing, and rich beyond her wildest expectations, so she could do nothing but give thanks as she leaned back complacently in the motor-car during the days that followed.

At Aix-les-Bains ten days' gayety was crowded into four, and dinners, dances, the life of the Casino, motor trips, and card parties were mixed up in a confused whirl in Helen's tired brain, as they finally started on their way southward, the Mercedes eating up the miles in a cloud of dust.

The two ladies were often silent now as the days sped by, and their lazy glances at the lovely scenery sweeping by in changing pictures were but a restful respite which would enable them to prepare for the gayeties still to come.

It was not until after they had arrived at the Hôtel de L'Europe and were having tea in Mrs. Van Alstyne's sitting-room that Helen realized what a strain she had been under. Mrs. Van Alstyne, putting down her cup,

looked first at Helen and then turned to Mrs. Mainwaring.

"What have you been doing with this child, Agatha?" she asked abruptly.

"Why what is the matter with her?" answered Agatha, with an inquiring look at the speaker.

Before Mrs. Van Alstyne could frame a rejoinder, Helen rose quickly and walked to the window, her lips trembling. Tears coursed down her cheeks and prevented her from seeing the view of Lake Como which spread out before her.

"What *is* the matter?" asked Mrs. Van Alstyne, rising and approaching Helen solicitously.

"Oh, it is nothing," sobbed Helen; "only, I am so tired." And she rushed suddenly from the room.

So let us leave her face downward in her own room, while the two ladies are carefully explaining to each other that Helen has been doing too much, and that all she needs is a few days' rest; while the course of events advances a few months, giving the sequel to Marlino's guilty flight from Lionel's villa in Sicily.

XXIII

WILLARD DEANE was seated in his office, poring over a financial report of the Carrington Home, which Miss Teniel had sent for his approval, when a knock at the door, which had been discreetly closed by his new office-boy, disturbed and diverted his attention from the typewritten sheets he had been scrutinizing so closely.

"Come in," he said, without looking up.

"There's a man, a furriner dressed in black, to see ye," smiled Gallagher, the boy who had been bribed away from Deane's rival by the lure of gold.

"What is his business?" asked Deane looking with narrowed gaze at a text-book on Criminal Law, which mocked him from the plain deal bookcase opposite his desk.

"I dunno; ye told me to use me judgment, and——"

"And what?" inquired the other, nevertheless casting a glance in which there was the suspicion of a smile upon the book, which seemed to glare at him as if it were an enemy or had been unfairly treated on more than one occasion. "Did I not also say——"

"Yep," answered Gallagher unmoved, "ye did, but he said if ye'd see him ye never would regret it, and so I thought——"

"Show him in when I ring," announced Deane curtly, nodding with considerable familiarity at the obnoxious text-book. "Go out and close the door quietly."

Deane's sudden willingness to see the mysterious man in black, as he mentally termed the person he was about

to have an interview with, was induced merely by curiosity. The epithet he used was a perfectly natural one, for Deane, "the astute criminal lawyer," as he was called, was in the habit of reading the most glaring, the most ridiculously sensational, headlines in the worst of the yellow journals; and his reputation for unscrupulousness was fed, in a measure, by his known love for the realistic and depraved.

While Deane was setting the stage, so to speak, by putting away the report, seeing that his pistol was in its accustomed place in the second drawer of the desk, and placing a chair so that his visitor should face the light, Gallagher outside was furtively watching the strange man and indulging in speculations about him.

What, was his first thought, did that "mug" want here annyhow? He was an ugly-looking customer with his square heavy jaw and his beady black eyes.

By and by Gallagher's interest in the man faded, and he considered whether he had done wisely to change "shops," as he called it. "Old Scrim" had been square, and he was a lot cleverer than Deane, but it was the boodle that done the "biz." He said to himself that he had been blinded by the "danged color of the red;" it was his vulnerable spot, and he had "fell right down with his hands stretched out, like a sheeny pawnbroker."

A distant but convincing sound of a bell aroused the boy from dreams of an earthly paradise of his own making, and he sprang to his feet with alacrity. Then, recollecting himself, he turned to the dark-skinned man, nodded, and pointed over his shoulder with his thumb in the direction of Deane's closed door.

"*Cosa è?*" asked the man impatiently; and then, with a cunning smile, "Is it to go in?"

"It is," remarked Reddy, with a touch of impudence. "You 're it, see?"

A stare, a shrug of the massive shoulders, greeted the boy, and the man vanished softly through the door of Deane's sanctum, closing it noiselessly behind him.

While the boy, after kicking his heels for a time against the rung of his chair, and tiring of his engrossing thoughts, whipped out a serial story entitled "The Revenge of Scotty, or The Trail of Blood," Marlino, for it was he, stood motionless waiting for Deane to give him an opening.

"Sit down, man—there on that chair," exclaimed the lawyer finally, looking up and bestowing a shrewd, searching glance upon his visitor. "Now, what is it? Out with it. My time is valuable."

Marlino leaned forward until he sat on the edge of his chair.

"I'm Giuseppe Marlino. You, who are Lionel Carrington's friend, I come to tell he no more."

Deane stared at the tense form, the expressionless face, with its deep-set, sullen eyes staring back at him, at the black soft felt hat held with firm clasp in two large hands, at the one sign of real emotion, the swollen, beating vein in the curiously mottled neck, before he put his next question.

"He is dead, then? What do you know about it?"

Why did not the fellow answer? Why did he look back at him so strangely? Deane turned his eyes away, but he could feel the man was studying him, travelling with shrewd, calculating gaze over and through him, taking in every detail, until he, usually cool and unmoved began to feel uncomfortable.

"Speak, man!" he said at last, in a hard tone. "What do you know?"

"I know wad I know," was the quiet answer, "but I not tell unless I'm assured safety." The tone of the voice was soft and insinuating as a woman's. "I must have absolute safety, and your sacred promise." The last word was uttered in a low tone, but Deane shivered slightly, for the sound of it was freighted with sinister meaning.

Without letting his unwavering gaze shift from the other, he unconsciously allowed his right hand to slip nearer to the drawer where the pistol lay ready for use. Then with a smile he looked down at the desk, while his left hand, slowly, very slowly, was raised until he stroked with his forefinger his closely shaven chin.

Marlino watched the other without moving. He noted the fixed smile, the strange actions, with an unnatural calm.

He feared to make a move, he feared to use his knife, for he was afraid of the contents of a certain drawer, which Deane's stealthy action had revealed to him, and of the boy without, the boy with the red, closely-cropped hair, freckled face and shrewd eyes.

"I can trust you? You—play square?"

"Oh, I will play—fair. You can trust me," answered Deane carelessly. And he yawned as if bored.

"That good," was the reply.

"It would be better to say nothing outside," remarked Deane.

"I understand. I trust you then." And the man smiled grimly.

"And now," continued Deane, ignoring the other's insinuation with supreme composure, "tell me your story," his tone suddenly assuming a business-like and brisk character as he drew into position a writing-pad. With

pencil poised, he prepared to listen attentively to what the other had to say, himself taking down the recital in careful short-hand notes, to be transmitted later with greater fulness on the typewriter; for it would never do, if there was anything to this man's story, to have anyone know who could not be trusted—and of course it would have to be proved later on.

"Go on," he said. "I am ready."

"I enter ze service of ze late Lionel Carrington eight years go," began Marlino, in the monotone in which a schoolboy repeats his lesson, "and I his fait'ful servant til ze day he falsely accuse me of stealing 'is diamond pin. He dismiss me, but say he no prosecute, as I been wiz 'im so long. I say 'is own words. I left wiz blind rage in my heart and swore vengeance 'gainst 'im. I been many years member of a Society which live on ze fear it make feel in ozzers of its power. We find out secrets of our rich countrymen, and get money from zem. Up to ze time I leave Signor Carrington's service, I been only lukewarm member, but now revenge for grievance make me ask help, for zay rich and very powerful. Zis ze first time it been tried to get money from man who not Italian, but zay willing, as I hoped, to help me, because I was of zem and suffer grave insult to my honor. Letters sent, but he——"

"I know. Cut that out," exclaimed Deane, who had memories in connection with that part of the story, which he would rather not have recalled.

"Signor Carrington go abroad, you know, and from ze moment he step from ze *treno* in *Parigi* I follow 'im like shadow."

"Why did you merely follow him, when you must have had plenty of opportunities to attack him?" asked Deane.

"To make tink 'imself safe, and when he most forgot me I sudden come. I go secretly before him to Sicily and lay plan, but wen ze lady come I fear, for I feel sure she goin' know and spect me."

"What was her name?"

"Her name? I know not," was the puzzled answer. "But that no importance. Some lady-love, I tink, but I not find out who she was. However, I wait always patient, and I talk wiz ze man who work in villa for him; he my friend, and I find Signor Carrington still drink heavy and stick himself with poison needle. But he awful sick, and his wife, ze lady—but she no wife—fear he die soon, and so she unhappy. She know he not love her, and she go one day to Palermo, very sad; she tell my friend to see ze priest. My friend tink she tired not to be wife really, so she go get priest to come and marry zem; but I tink not, I tink she go tell her sin. But that not importance neither."

"But why on earth did he go to Sicily?" asked Deane. "It is the very hot-bed of your conspiracy."

"Because he always say he want go dere for 'is healt', and now he go, because he tink to deceive. He tink we 'spect he 'fraid go dere. He hope to trow sand in our eyes. No good."

"It was exceedingly foolhardy of him, but—what happened then?" inquired the other impatiently.

"I know chance come at last," pursued Marlino, "so I wait till she go, and I hang round to listen wad he do. Make lots noise, cursing, and later on 'is lunch tray brought in. He drink big drink wine and sleep, zen I look in. Ze long window closed, and as he wake I step away and hide. After while I peep out, and he call and stumble in ze room. Finally he sit down and get

poison needle ready, while I watch like a cat. Just as he goin' stick 'is arm I open softly ze window and step in. He shriek and call my name. When I hear sound of weak voice I hate, I forget to ask for money, I only see red and strike quick." Here Marlino made a motion as if stabbing a man. "He fall dyin', and so I go away wiz nobody knowin', for my friend he say nozzin', he my friend."

"You killed Mr. Carrington! And—you seem to have no remorse."

Marlino nodded and shook his forefinger, the Italian negative.

"Well, then," proceeded Deane, continuing to make notes on his pad, "tell me why you killed him."

"Because," was the excited reply, "he wrong me, and I want revenge."

Deane did not smile at the rich rolling of the "r" in the last word of his sentence, but made a few flourishes and curves on his pad before he spoke.

"Did you think," he asked finally, "that money would satisfy you, that it would condone your crime?"

"I had revenge, and I 'm glad," was Marlino's only reply; and it was evident he could not understand the other's subtleties. "I tell you I 'm glad, glad, glad," he reiterated fiercely.

"But why," persisted the lawyer, following out his line of thought, "have you come to me?"

"I tell you zat!" exclaimed Marlino, smiling. "Because—I want—more—revenge." And his narrowed gaze seemed to presuppose some freemasonry between the two, some secret means known only to them, some subtle, devilish method of thought transference, as if his meaning must already be clear to the other.

"Ah, yes," remarked Deane; "against the Society, I suppose. But why?"

"Because ze Society claim I kill Signor Carrington for revenge of my own, and not obey zere orders to demand blood-money, so I come to you and give information."

"But you are breaking your oath!" objected Deane. "What is the penalty for that?"

"*La morte,*" replied the other, staring gloomily at the glaring pattern of the carpet, "but zay not succeed."

"You will kill yourself?" inquired Deane astonished.

"Perhaps," remarked Marlino. "Wad else can I do? You not know ze Society evidently. It relentless when any one breaks its laws. My life already forfeit, but I no give zem chance to have so much satisfaction."

"You are in a fix," exclaimed Deane, struck by the other's calm tone, which had, however, the resistless undercurrent of the fatalist in its essence. "But I am afraid I cannot help you. Still," he continued, "you had better give me the information now, unless your courage has failed you."

"How zat be?" cried Marlino, surprised. "I tell you I 'm dead already—inside. Do wad I say and you strike at ze heart of ze Society. Arrest Colucci. He is ze power behind ze t'rone. I have spoken my deat'-warrant. Santa Maria, forgive!" and the man, casting his eyes to Heaven, crossed himself fervently.

"How can I get hold of him?" asked Deane. "He must be a slippery fellow."

"*Macchè!* He a snake, cold wiz a heart of ice. Arrest 'im and you have ze whole Society in your hand's palm. 'Is address is —— —— Street. If you manage right, you get 'im in your power."

"You are telling me the truth?" asked Deane suspiciously.

"I swear it in Madonna's name," answered Marlino.

Deane rose to show that the interview was at an end, and Marlino rose too, shortly afterwards going out as quietly as he had come in.

It was some time before Deane could recover from the shock of the interview; and then, arousing himself, he remembered he had something still to do. He locked the door, after telling Gallagher to go out and get his dinner, then to come to him as soon as he got back.

His next move was to elaborate the notes he had taken, and copy them on the typewriter. By the time he had finished his work and written a note to Colucci, incriminating Marlino and promising to produce him, a tap at the door made him look up, and, unlocking the door, he admitted Gallagher. Carefully closing the door, he relocked it.

"See here, boy, I want your help," said Deane sternly, "and you must keep your mouth shut, can you?"

"Sure!" said the boy, his eyes fixed on Deane's "What I promises, I keeps to, see?"

There was a faint stress on the last word, and Deane smiled as he realized the boy's covert insinuation.

"The man who has just gone out, Marlino, I wish to see again. I want you to take a note to him, and one to this man. It may be dangerous. Are you willing to serve me?"

"I will, and depend upon it, ye could n't find a safer man."

Deane smiled at the last word, and, after writing the notes, gave them to Gallagher, who then started to leave the room.

"Are you sure you can manage this?" asked Deane anxiously.

"Say, ye make me tired," remarked Gallagher in a weary voice.

Before Deane could answer the door banged, and Gallagher was in the lift, which he had been lucky enough to catch.

Deane, therefore, smiled as he took off the receiver of his telephone, and called up Police Headquarters.

"Hello! Is that you, Kelly? What? Oh, it *is* you? Why not say so, then? Yes. Deane. The same. I want you and one more like you to be in my office to-morrow at five minutes to twelve. Yes, sharp. In plain clothes. Um—um, going to be some fun on. What? Yes, big haul. Yes, there is something for both of you, as usual. Good-bye." Deane lit a pipe and dreamed for a while. Finally he rose and reached for his hat, preparatory to going out. Yes, he had done a good day's work, and arranged a rather dramatic scene for to-morrow. Two policemen at five minutes to twelve. Colucci at noon sharp, and Marlino at five minutes past. "Things ought to be lively after the last man comes in," he murmured as he locked the outer door and made his way to the lift.

Later in the afternoon Gallagher came in, and, walking into Deane's office without knocking, sat down.

"Gee, Boss, I 'm tired—but the same answer goes for the two letters: *all right*. Say, here's a note from one of 'em. I near forgot it."

The letter ran as follows:

"My girl, Elena Mafredo, has sent word to Colucci to come see her to-morrow at tree o'clock at above address. If all fails you come here get 'im. He tinks she love 'im, and as he

is mad for her, he will not 'spect a trap, and you are sure to find 'im here. Elena may tell you more of Society zan I, but she must not come to harm. Yours,

G. M."

"You 're a good lad!" exclaimed Deane, not unkindly, "and here's a present for you."

Reddy sat up, his eyes wide open.

"This for me? Say, you 're a brick."

XXIV

NEXT morning, when Deane entered his office, he found Gallagher, coatless, with sleeves rolled up, setting the rooms to rights.

"Got to get well red up, Mister Deane," he said, with a slow wink, as the lawyer stood watching him. Deane smiled, too, after a futile effort to be dignified.

"That 's right, Reddy. It 's the early bird that catches the worm, you know."

His work finished, the boy applied himself to an intimate perusal of his favorite detective story, while his master read over again the typewritten report of Marlino's information, which he had made out in detail from his short-hand notes.

Apart from the wisdom of having the two men meet, arose the question of fairness, which he had promised to the one who had been, partly by adverse circumstance, partly by the dominating influence of the other—Colucci—induced to become what he was.

The fact that he had told Marlino that he would play fair would not ordinarily have affected his conscience or his judgment, yet it caused him vague uneasiness, though the feelings of others, considerations for them, had never caused him a moment's hesitation before, except in so far as it affected his own personal position and the result he planned to bring about for his own benefit. Was his motive after all unselfish? Was he not actuated by reasons of greed, as of old?

"I could n't possibly care what became of Marlino, a man of no morals and insane enough to have killed a man who was my friend. Poor old Lionel!"

That all murderers were more or less insane he firmly believed, and had saved many an unfortunate from the gallows by making that his plea.

"Marlino is a dead letter. I have gained all I can from him, and he need not be reckoned with in future. But Colucci is a present menace, and a factor I have always wished to control. I am about to lay my hands on him, and, as I hope, put an end to his power. When his wings are once clipped, if Marlino spoke the truth, the other evil birds will fly away in dismay, their leader being definitely under restraint and unable to help them. He is as good as—gone."

There was a knock at the door, and the boy came in.

"It 's just quarter o' twelve o'clock," said Gallagher, and he prepared to go out again.

"Wait a minute, boy, leave the door open," interposed Deane. "Now go out and put the coat-tree over there, not so far; there, that 's right—and a chair on the other side by the window. Now," he continued, joining Gallagher in the outer office, "I will sit in the chair, and you stand in the outer doorway. Can you see me?"

"No," answered Reddy. "Ye 're well hid."

"Now walk a few steps forward, keeping your eye on the table, with the chair beside it near my door. Better keep your eye a few feet above the chair. Now can you see me? Not even out of the corner of your eye?"

"Nup," said Gallagher. "Say!" he continued. "Ain't ye kiddin' me? What 's up annyhow?"

"You are to sit on that chair by the table," announced Deane, ignoring the other's questions, "and you are not to move from there. You are to do just what I say. Two policemen in plain clothes will come first; show them in at once. The man who comes next is to sit by the window, hidden by the coat-tree. As soon as

the last man, an Italian like the first, arrives, I will come out. It does n't make any difference whether you have ever seen either of them before or not. If you have, don't let on. When the policemen come out, don't pay any attention to them either. A great deal depends on whether you carry out my instructions strictly or not. All depends on it, boy. Now sit down and wait. I will go into my office. Ready! Sharp."

About five minutes later the two policemen arrived, and were duly shown into the inner office. Deane greeted them and pointed to two chairs.

"Now," he said, when they were seated in front of his desk, "for your orders."

"I brought O'Brien with me——" began Kelly, but Deane interrupted him impatiently.

"So I see, and I have the two best men on the force," he said drily, as if it were not a matter for discussion. "Now," he went on more quickly, "listen to me. Two men are coming to-day, and one of them will be a big haul. He will come first, at twelve. When he arrives you are to walk out into the outer office, after closing this door, and busy yourselves there, so as not to arouse the suspicions of the man in the corner. I can see through a tiny hole in the door, and when the second man comes in I will step out and say, 'Now.' Then you are to step forward, snap the bracelets on the man by the window, and arrest him on charges which I shall prefer before the magistrate later. You have your 'John Doe' warrants with you? Right."

"All right, Boss. We got it all clear."

As the men stopped speaking, the first deep tones of a clock from a neighboring church tower rang out, so Deane rose and looked through the minute hole. No one was there, save Gallagher.

Ten minutes, twenty minutes, and then a half hour passed. Still no one came.

Deane opened the door, and, followed by the two policemen, stepped out.

"Our plot has failed," he said. "But," addressing O'Brien and handing him a card, "you go to this address at quarter past three, and knock three times on the door—number 12, second floor back. You will find two men and a woman there. Take Kelly with you, too—you are both armed, I suppose—well, you'd better be, for the gang is a desperate one. The woman is a decoy, but we may get some information out of her. The men, Colucci and the other, are those we are after. Now, be off."

At a quarter past four the two men returned.

"We got Colucci and the woman, but the other, Marlino, is dead. Shot himself, when we tried to break in an inner door, where he had hastily concealed himself. Colucci is an ugly brute—we had to call in two men to hold him—but the girl—say, the girl is a peach!"

Deane paid the men, dismissed them, and leaving the door open retired to his inner office. He remained there making out a report of the arrest, and just as he brought it to an end a step in the outer room caused him to look up sharply.

A man stood in the doorway. It was Scrimmins, smiling, and unctuous.

"Sit down," said Deane, gruffly but not ungraciously; and then to Gallagher, who was rather nonplussed by the encounter, "Same time to-morrow."

"Why, thank you, I will," answered Scrimmins. "Just heard the news of the arrest. Who were those men?"

"Major Scrimmins," said Deane gravely, "I will ad-

mit that I know who those men were, but I refuse to give you the information."

"Oh, all right—but listen to me!" answered Scrimmins after a long pause, during which he seemed lost in thought. "Certain articles lately, pretty near the mark, have given offense, and City Living has been threatened with exposure. Now I am anxious to change the character of the paper, and induce the management to adopt a new policy. Will you help me do this?"

Deane listened attentively.

"Can we afford, major, to drop the mask, turn over a new leaf, and become virtuous at this late date? Is it not rather late in the day to find out that we have consciences?"

"We are not merely finding it out," corrected the major grimly, "we are having the courage to admit it."

"I wonder what you are up to," mused Deane looking shrewdly at Scrimmins.

"I am not going to say," retorted the other, "because you would not believe me."

"But what has brought about this change of heart?" inquired Deane curiously.

"Well, I will tell you, after all. I have been a very successful man in my time, but I am getting old. Sometimes I feel very old. And I am tired of living by making capital out of the frailty of others. I believe it was the fright of possible exposure which opened my eyes; but, whatever the motive, I intend to reform myself primarily, and then to be the friend of reform in others."

Deane did not reply at once to this enigmatical speech, and the major wondered what was the matter. He did not, however, attempt to break in on the other's reverie.

"Major," Deane said finally, in what was intended to

be an impressive tone "I wonder whether you are sincere. Up to the present time—we have not, to say the least, considered each other's feelings or other people's, either. It was a case of the survival of the fittest. In the present instance, my object was the arrest of one Colucci, who, I was told was the leader of a band of conspirators. I wrote to Colucci to come at a certain time, and offered as a bribe the man who had given me the information. It has always been my ambition to lay my hands on these dastardly Italians. It was then I made the fatal mistake of asking the informant, as I shall call him, to come too."

"You got Colucci, and Marlino is dead!" whispered the major. "Well, the Society is not vanquished, even though Colucci is in your hands. Here are the plans for conquering them and—another matter I want to talk to you about."

Deane took the sheaf of typewritten sheets and added, as he did so, that they would have hard work to live down their former reputations. The major merely sniffed, and told him to consider the future, and to let the past, which they intended to live down, be forgotten.

"Why, this is a most remarkable scheme for reform!" cried Deane looking up. "Who is the man who drew this?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you," answered the major, "though I have known him for some time. The writer, who has been making a complete study of the evils of politics in various parts of the world, so that they can better be eliminated here in our own city, wishes to be present when the scheme is ready to be started. It will prove a great wave of reform, and we can be on the crest of it, if we wish to."

"Where do I come in?" cried Deane, tossing the report down on his desk.

"Where?" was the grave answer, "that is what I want to tell you. He wants you to run for district attorney. He has given me plenary power to act in his absence. With the unknown as governor, we can put down the existing evils; and my paper," he added boldly, "will become the official organ of the new order. As district attorney, you could fight, among other blights, these infamous 'black hand' conspiracies, and make yourself famous. Think of the money there would be—for both of us. Will you—accept?"

"I will!" exclaimed Deane, rising and stretching out his hand. "And, Scrim—there's more in this than either you or I can see, at present," he added unblushingly.

After Scrimmins had left, Deane sat for a long time thinking over the various events of this wonderful day. Failure in the earlier hours faded before the smiling glow of the sun, and the lawyer, like a cat, curled up and basked in its warmth.

It all seemed too wonderful, and he could hardly believe it true, for by the pact just made all things seemed to be possible, and the future, bright with garish colors, looked near, almost within his grasp. He was looking out over the pathways of his future life, and already he could see in fancy the spreading bay-trees of success, entwined with great golden leaves; though these, defining the limit his footsteps should press in his journey to the distant horizon, were as yet veiled in mist.

Deane raised his eyes, and as he did so the duties of his every-day life came back to his mind. He lifted the receiver off the telephone and called up the Carrington Home. Miss Teniel was out, so he left word that he

would like to see her at his office, if convenient, any hour the following morning, to discuss the financial report she had sent him.

Then he rose and stretched himself luxuriously, after which, donning his hat and catching up his stick, he went on his way homeward, chuckling with malicious triumph.

XXV

THE next morning the first person to enter the office was Gallagher. After he had given the office its customary cleaning he seated himself at his desk and started to copy out some reports for Deane; but his eye soon wandered, seeking for some more exciting occupation. His eye almost at once met a certain paper-bound book, but the said eye became immediately scornful, and with a snort he unwillingly returned to his unfinished task.

Again and again, however, the shifting eye fixed itself on the alluring little pamphlet, until weakly he threw aside his pen and took up the book. He simply *had* to know how Scotty ever escaped from his captors.

"When Scotty awoke, it was to find himself bound firmly hand and foot. His weapons, among them the trusty six-shooter which had been the means of saving his life in a score of tight places, were gone. A faint glow, coming from some hidden source, lighted up the cabin he was in, and by its dim refulgence he discovered he was lying on a rude couch. As he was seeking for means of deliverance from his predicament, the door opened, and he saw with astonishment that it was the stately Gladys who stood poised on the threshold. In her hand she held a flickering candle, and its faint glimmer cast strange reflections on her haughty, high-bred face. She motioned him to remain quiet, and, indeed, he would have found it difficult to move, for he was both gagged and bound.

"'Ha! as I thought,' exclaimed Gladys, dropping her candlestick on the damp earth, which was the only floor the rude building boasted of. 'It is thus my noble father treats his honored guest! Fair sir, listen to me. Your life is forfeit unless you follow my instructions. I am in danger, too, but I

feared some mishap had befallen you, and cast about for some means to save you. Take this ball of twine, this pencil and this——'"

A hand rested on his shoulder,—gasping, the boy looked up to confront Deane, who had entered quietly and was smiling down at him. Patting the boy's tousled head with a kindly gesture, he passed into the inner office.

Deane looked about the room, drummed on his desk, pulled out his watch, and glanced at the telephone near him; then his eye looked idly out through the open window. Evidently his thoughts were pleasant, for looking once more about his office he smiled.

"I am like a cat," he said aloud. "I hate to move, but I suppose I shall have to hunt up other quarters soon, among"—he lowered his voice insensibly—"a better class of tenants. It would never do for Willard Deane, the district attorney, to be in such a neighborhood. Why, let me see, there is Rinto, the Jewish tailor, in the basement; Jacobsen the pawnbroker, above him; myself; and on the floor above, Makeda the palmist, and some half-dozen other nobodies. It 's disgraceful. I don't know how I have stood it so long."

A knock at the door made him start, and in response to his summons Gallagher ushered in Maud with considerable ceremony. Deane rose and greeted Miss Teniel, with just the proper amount of cordiality. Outwardly the master was improving as well as the boy.

"I am afraid I am outrageously late," began Maud, as the lawyer grasped her hand for a brief instant in greeting—and then she paused.

What had happened? In some unaccountable way the man's manner was robbed of the very qualities which had previously irritated her. She noticed that there was some indefinable change, but had no further chance to

determine the cause then, as the lawyer, with an imperceptibly dominating influence, spoke to her. The man pointed out a chair to her which was, however, not in front of him as usual, but on the other side nearest the window.

When they were thus sitting side by side, Deane pulled out the slide which formed a small table, and took up Maud's letter. While he was thus engaged, Miss Teniel opened her small bag, and taking out a folded paper opened it, spread it out on the slide, and looked up at him.

"Mr. Deane," she said referring to her paper, "I am in a quandary and I have nobody to consult except you. I am the custodian of the fund used for the running expenses of the Carrington Home, as you know. It is more than sufficient for that, but not in any degree enough to carry out the improvement which I have often discussed with—my late superintendent."

Deane started slightly at the concluding words of her sentence. How much did she know? Was she already aware of Lionel's death? Her next words, however, reassured him, and made it evident that she was ignorant of that fact.

"I am sincerely anxious to carry out his wishes, but I have not the money to make the radical improvements it was Mr. Carrington's intention to undertake."

"My dear Miss Teniel," said Deane, "I am glad you came to me, for I can give you advice, and possibly help you in such questions as those of estimates, if you have gone as far as that."

"I have the estimates," answered Maud, "but I did not feel that I could go so far as to accept any of them without consultation. I have Mr. Carrington's list here, and I found a contractor who was willing to draw up

plans and roughly calculate the probable sum it would take to bring them to completion. By that, I mean cost of building, material, labor, and so on. The total was many thousands beyond the means at my disposal. The addition to the nurses' home is the thing we need most, as their present quarters are cramped and not as comfortable as I should wish to see in an institution of the standing of the Carrington Home. The other items are more in the nature of luxuries—though some of them are almost necessities if we are to keep the home up to the standard of excellence Mr. Carrington always thought essential. I know there are methods of raising money, but I have a woman's horror of such things as mortgages, notes, etc., and besides, there is very little security beyond the property except bonds, which I could not touch. I see no other way to get the money except by borrowing and that I hesitate to do, unless you know of some other means, do you?"

"I can answer yes to that question," said Deane, "and I should have written you to come and see me about that very thing, if I had not already done so in regard to the report. The money is yours to take when you wish. It was only yesterday a certain fact brought the knowledge of it to me."

"What do you mean?" cried Maud, placing her hand unconsciously on his arm in her excitement.

"Before I answer you," replied Deane gravely, "I must ask you one question. What was your opinion of Lionel Carrington at the time you and he were associated together?"

"My good opinion relates solely to the man in his character as superintendent of the Carrington Home," answered Maud, perplexed. "The man was quite different when outside of the influence of the work he

loved, and I have no feeling save pity for the unfortunate who through weakness made himself his own worst enemy."

"And you have no reason to alter that opinion?" asked Deane. "You neither had nor have now any personal——"

"None," corrected Miss Teniel. "I pitied him as a man, but admired him in his official capacity."

"Then," continued Deane slowly, "I can safely tell you the truth. He is dead."

"Dead!" gasped Maud in shocked tones. "Oh, I knew the life he was living would kill him soon!"

"It was not the drug which killed him——" began Deane, and something sinister in his tone induced Miss Teniel to interrupt him quickly:

"What else was it? Tell me."

"At present I know only that he was murdered, and I have cabled the American consul at Palermo for particulars."

"Murdered! Oh!" cried Maud, closing her eyes for an instant and raising her shoulders, as if she were in physical pain, "how horrible! But his murderer?"

"His murderer is dead, too," replied Deane, in an expressionless voice. And Maud, noticing that Deane looked suddenly grey and old, dropped the subject, returning to a statement which the lawyer had previously made.

"But," she asked, "how can I touch the money? It was his to do with as he pleased. Surely he has not left it to me?"

"My dear Miss Teniel," answered Deane quickly, "I am afraid I have unwittingly misled you, and we are preparing to play at cross-purposes. Perhaps the sim-

plest way would be to read you his will, the original of which I have here, and then you will see what I mean."

"I think that would be the best plan," she agreed, "as at present I am rather mystified. At one moment you say the money is mine, and in the next breath you say I have not got it."

"Here is the will," remarked Deane quietly, glancing at her suspiciously, to see whether she were provoked or not. Seeing no signs of it in her expectant face, he unfolded the document and began to read:

" 'To Maud Teniel, in whom I have every confidence, I bequeath, etc., the sum of ——— dollars, to her, etc., without conditions, knowing well she will use it to the best advantage——' "

"Ah, I am happy at last!" cried Maud, tears of joy standing in her eyes. "I am quite overcome. You don't know what this means to me. It has been my ambition to be at the head of affairs out there—and now there is no one to interfere. I can act freely, and yet carry out his wishes. That money is the sum his mother left to him to found the home, and now he has given it to me. I will go on with the good work, faithfully, to the best of my ability. But go on. There must be more."

"Yes, of course there is," echoed Deane, turning over the pages until he found what he was looking for. "You see, you have absolutely the use of the money which Mrs. Carrington left to her son; that is what confused you. But his share of his father's estate, which the father could not will away—I have a copy of that will, too—he leaves to Miss Helen Mainwaring, all except one or two small legacies. The stipulation attached to that bequest is that she shall receive it only on condition that it be used for the sole purpose of carrying out the im-

provements at the hospital you spoke of; otherwise it reverts to you, absolutely, for the same purpose. You see, it gives you almost complete power if she refuses to accept the condition." And Deane looked critically at her out of the corner of his eye.

"I am so glad for Helen," Maud said simply. "I do hope she will accept."

Here was a lesson for Deane to try and absorb: the knowledge that any one could be so absolutely unselfish in a case like this, and so honestly pleased at another's good fortune, which might be hers, if it were managed cleverly—here he smiled shrewdly—for there are many ways of bringing the apparently impossible to pass.

"You will let me know when the formalities have been attended to?" she suggested as he walked by her side to the outer door and politely bowed her out.

"Of course," he replied absently. "You will hear from me in due season." And he softly closed the door on her retreating form.

What a fine woman she was, and how satisfactory it was for the interests of the Carrington Home that she was to be at its head! A tremendous success seemed about to dawn for it, and he was glad it was to be so, for he was loyal to Lionel's memory, and this had been his pet hobby. "If he could have lived," sighed Deane bitterly, as he prepared to leave his office.

Deane's closing thought, however, in connection with Lionel was that he must have used Helen Mainwaring's interest in the hospital as a decoy to catch her, and perhaps for many reasons it was better that he were dead and out of temptation's way. And this made him ask himself how Helen would answer his letter, for it seemed in some ways a companion question to it; and how would the news of Lionel's death affect her?

Maud, too, on her way homewards, thought tenderly of Helen. What was she doing now? What would she do? What would become of her? The answer to these questions, which she was destined to learn before the end of the year, she could not help hoping would solve the riddle of the girl's destiny, and make her see with clearness her life's path stretching out before her.

XXVI

MRS. VAN ALSTYNE had been right, and Helen, after her momentary weakness, which had been really nothing more than a feeling of discouragement, took up her fight again from the point at which she had left it.

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At first they were the only guests, but after two or three days several more people arrived at Villa Bel Respiro, which, indeed, was roomy enough for an exceedingly large gathering. At present the party consisted of the Marchioness of Armsea, Count and Countess Lütgow, Barry Fitzgerald, and the Duca d'Astraluce, besides the hostess and themselves; but Mrs. Van Alstyne learned from her maid that one more guest was expected shortly, a Mr. Seward Blatchford.

"What does he do?" asked Mrs. Van Alstyne of Maitland.

"I don't know, madam," answered she. "I don't rightly know, but some says he is a kind of politician."

"Is he a gentleman?" asked her mistress, sniffing as if some deleterious odor were about to offend her sensitive nostrils.

"I suppose so, madam——" This indifferently, but with a suspicion of Mrs. Van Alstyne's grand manner. "I think he 's what they call an informer."

"You mean a reformer, I suppose," corrected Mrs. Van Alstyne sharply.

While this conversation was in progress, Helen was having tea with Ethel Santley in her boudoir, the others having theirs in the great hall below, or on the terrace, or not at all, as the mood seized them.

"Helen dear, you don't know what a pleasure it is to have you here," said Maud's sister, looking affectionately at the girl, who, clad in a loose tea-gown, was lazily enjoying her cup of tea.

"I liked you from the first," admitted Helen, as she stirred her tea leisurely; "as I care for Maud so tremendously that I knew I should."

"I am fond of Maud, too," said Lady Santley ingenuously. "She is so fitted to her chosen life, whereas I love the world too much to give it up. Years ago, when my dear husband was alive, Maud was then a comparatively young girl, and she used to stay with us. At that time she was always the gayest of the gay, and had a great deal of attention." Lady Santley sighed.

"How did she happen to take up nursing?" asked Helen.

"My dear, it is a sad story, but if you care to hear it I will tell you. I think Maud always had a taste for it; and when one of her friends, Beryl Kane began to work in one of the London hospitals, Maud decided to take a year's course, too, to see, I suppose, whether she would like it or not. I had no objection, for Maud had been out for three years, and, although there had been persistent rumors of her engagement to a rich American, one Rufus Ripley, who was much older than she, nothing had ever come of it. All went smoothly until on a certain day came the sad news of Ripley's death in a railway accident near Plymouth. He was on his way back to

England from home, as I always call it, and it was learned later that he intended to see Maud and get her answer. She confessed, too, that she was in love with him, and had meant to accept him. He, poor man, had had no objection to the nursing, as I suppose he looked on it as a mere fad, as I did, supposing she would lose her interest in it when she married him."

"That is why she stuck to it," sighed Helen; "that is why she made it her life work."

"Yes," answered Ethel Santley briefly, struck by some indefinable tone in Helen's voice, "that is why she made it her life's work. Maud wrote me about you, that is why I almost knew you before I saw you, and I hope you did not mind my calling you Helen directly."

"Why of course not," interposed Helen quickly.

"Maud," continued the other, "always spoke of you so affectionately. She said you were invaluable to her, but she thought you were too young to give up the world for a profession, merely because you liked it."

Helen replied with a gesture.

"But the world, dear?" objected Lady Santley. "You could not give that up entirely?"

"I did go out in a half-hearted way, but since my illness I have liked it better," prevaricated Helen, concealing her real reason.

"Quite right. I am glad you are coming to your senses," asserted Lady Santley—mercilessly, as Helen thought, knowing the true facts. "Now, Helen, let us discuss our guests; and I wish you to tell me what you think of them—all, mind."

"As a game, it might be fun," remarked Helen, trying to make out whether her hostess were serious or not, "but in cold blood to say what I think of your guests—I really could not."

"Oh! I don't mind what you say," was the unruffled reply. "I have no personal feeling for any of them. They amuse me, that is all. I will prompt you if you get frightened. You see, I have always retained my sense of humor, though I have lived so long in England I have absorbed a great deal of their lack of sensitiveness. Now go on. First, Lady Armsea—what do you think of her?"

"I think she is very worldly," began Helen slowly, "but I fancy she has a heart hidden away somewhere."

"Well, she keeps it for Barry Fitzgerald, then, I have no doubt," remarked her ladyship blandly. "He is her pet dog and follows wherever she goes."

"That's the way the land lies?" said Helen, looking up inquiringly. "Now, who next, for Lord Armsea is not here, so we can't discuss him?"

"No," answered Ethel; "he is not in the same class with her. She married him for his money and frankly admits she did. Moreover, she says that she married him also because he loved her, and she knew of no other way of getting rid of him. She 's very original, but thoroughly selfish, for she leaves him alone, except in the season, when she says he is a protection. They never stay in the same country houses, and people know that pretty well now, except that old frump, Lady Loftus, who always thinks she knows more about other people's business than they do themselves. She says it is better not to notice quarrels, and people must speak to each other in her house. She tried to work out her pet theory in their case last autumn, and there was a row, I can tell you. Lady Armsea told me she thought seriously of a separation, only her son, who is her weak point, stood in the way. How about the Lütgows?"

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claimed Helen, laughing, not realizing that the whole point of the conversation was that Lady Santley should have an opportunity of studying her; "though of course he is a gentleman, well-informed, well-read, and distinguished. He cannot help being a bore, but I don't think he is a very tiresome one. At first he seems extraordinarily brilliant and a charming companion; but very soon one feels that the intellectual metal does not ring true, not because there is a hidden flaw in it, but because it is of an inferior quality."

"*Brava,* Helen!" cried Ethel, clapping her hands. "You have struck the nail on the head that time. What about his wife?"

"She's a nice, quiet soul," smiled Helen, "but she is just a *chimer.*"

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"Yes, I suppose so," admitted Helen grudgingly; "but I don't like her. Now, she tires me. I am afraid she belongs to the genus bore."

"No, not quite," objected the other, "for, you see, all these people have a place here, and that is individually and collectively to amuse me. They don't know that, so don't tell them. It would break up the party. Now there is Barry——"

"Oh, he is not a free agent!" said Helen, "as you yourself admit. He 's tame, and plays only those 'parlor tricks' which amuse her 'marchioness-ship.' "

"He makes love charmingly," agreed Ethel musingly, "writes very light verses, pays her bills if she asks him to, and goes easily in single or spike teams. He has never yet been tried in double harness, but would need a good

plans and roughly calculate the probable sum it would take to bring them to completion. By that, I mean cost of building, material, labor, and so on. The total was many thousands beyond the means at my disposal. The addition to the nurses' home is the thing we need most, as their present quarters are cramped and not as comfortable as I should wish to see in an institution of the standing of the Carrington Home. The other items are more in the nature of luxuries—though some of them are almost necessities if we are to keep the home up to the standard of excellence Mr. Carrington always thought essential. I know there are methods of raising money, but I have a woman's horror of such things as mortgages, notes, etc., and besides, there is very little security beyond the property except bonds, which I could not touch. I see no other way to get the money except by borrowing and that I hesitate to do, unless you know of some other means, do you?"

"I can answer yes to that question," said Deane, "and I should have written you to come and see me about that very thing, if I had not already done so in regard to the report. The money is yours to take when you wish. It was only yesterday a certain fact brought the knowledge of it to me."

"What do you mean?" cried Maud, placing her hand unconsciously on his arm in her excitement.

"Before I answer you," replied Deane gravely, "I must ask you one question. What was your opinion of Lionel Carrington at the time you and he were associated together?"

"My good opinion relates solely to the man in his character as superintendent of the Carrington Home," answered Maud, perplexed. "The man was quite different when outside of the influence of the work he

loved, and I have no feeling save pity for the unfortunate who through weakness made himself his own worst enemy."

"And you have no reason to alter that opinion?" asked Deane. "You neither had nor have now any personal——"

"None," corrected Miss Teniel. "I pitied him as a man, but admired him in his official capacity."

"Then," continued Deane slowly, "I can safely tell you the truth. He is dead."

"Dead!" gasped Maud in shocked tones. "Oh, I knew the life he was living would kill him soon!"

"It was not the drug which killed him——" began Deane, and something sinister in his tone induced Miss Teniel to interrupt him quickly:

"What else was it? Tell me."

"At present I know only that he was murdered, and I have cabled the American consul at Palermo for particulars."

"Murdered! Oh!" cried Maud, closing her eyes for an instant and raising her shoulders, as if she were in physical pain, "how horrible! But his murderer?"

"His murderer is dead, too," replied Deane, in an expressionless voice. And Maud, noticing that Deane looked suddenly grey and old, dropped the subject, returning to a statement which the lawyer had previously made.

"But," she asked, "how can I touch the money? It was his to do with as he pleased. Surely he has not left it to me?"

"My dear Miss Teniel," answered Deane quickly, "I am afraid I have unwittingly misled you, and we are preparing to play at cross-purposes. Perhaps the sim-

plest way would be to read you his will, the original of which I have here, and then you will see what I mean."

"I think that would be the best plan," she agreed, "as at present I am rather mystified. At one moment you say the money is mine, and in the next breath you say I have not got it."

"Here is the will," remarked Deane quietly, glancing at her suspiciously, to see whether she were provoked or not. Seeing no signs of it in her expectant face, he unfolded the document and began to read:

" 'To Maud Teniel, in whom I have every confidence, I bequeath, etc., the sum of ——— dollars, to her, etc., without conditions, knowing well she will use it to the best advantage——' "

"Ah, I am happy at last!" cried Maud, tears of joy standing in her eyes. "I am quite overcome. You don't know what this means to me. It has been my ambition to be at the head of affairs out there—and now there is no one to interfere. I can act freely, and yet carry out his wishes. That money is the sum his mother left to him to found the home, and now he has given it to me. I will go on with the good work, faithfully, to the best of my ability. But go on. There must be more."

"Yes, of course there is," echoed Deane, turning over the pages until he found what he was looking for. "You see, you have absolutely the use of the money which Mrs. Carrington left to her son; that is what confused you. But his share of his father's estate, which the father could not will away—I have a copy of that will, too—he leaves to Miss Helen Mainwaring, all except one or two small legacies. The stipulation attached to that bequest is that she shall receive it only on condition that it be used for the sole purpose of carrying out the im-

provements at the hospital you spoke of; otherwise it reverts to you, absolutely, for the same purpose. You see, it gives you almost complete power if she refuses to accept the condition." And Deane looked critically at her out of the corner of his eye.

"I am so glad for Helen," Maud said simply. "I do hope she will accept."

Here was a lesson for Deane to try and absorb: the knowledge that any one could be so absolutely unselfish in a case like this, and so honestly pleased at another's good fortune, which might be hers, if it were managed cleverly—here he smiled shrewdly—for there are many ways of bringing the apparently impossible to pass.

"You will let me know when the formalities have been attended to?" she suggested as he walked by her side to the outer door and politely bowed her out.

"Of course," he replied absently. "You will hear from me in due season." And he softly closed the door on her retreating form.

What a fine woman she was, and how satisfactory it was for the interests of the Carrington Home that she was to be at its head! A tremendous success seemed about to dawn for it, and he was glad it was to be so, for he was loyal to Lionel's memory, and this had been his pet hobby. "If he could have lived," sighed Deane bitterly, as he prepared to leave his office.

Deane's closing thought, however, in connection with Lionel was that he must have used Helen Mainwaring's interest in the hospital as a decoy to catch her, and perhaps for many reasons it was better that he were dead and out of temptation's way. And this made him ask himself how Helen would answer his letter, for it seemed in some ways a companion question to it; and how would the news of Lionel's death affect her?

Maud, too, on her way homewards, thought tenderly of Helen. What was she doing now? What would she do? What would become of her? The answer to these questions, which she was destined to learn before the end of the year, she could not help hoping would solve the riddle of the girl's destiny, and make her see with clearness her life's path stretching out before her.

XXVI

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active mate to make him play up. He is kind though, and free from bad habits."

"Heavens!" cried Helen, in mock horror. "How easily you damn him with faint praise."

"What else can I say?" asked Lady Santley, apparently serious, though there was a betraying light in her eye. "He has n't fine eyebrows, so that 's off; he does n't exercise—she does n't give him a chance to—so he 's too fat, and—but personal remarks are not 'good form.' I don't see what else is left to attack."

"Still," mused Helen, "I think it is a little severe to speak so disparagingly of an unfortunate man. I am sure he always does his share——"

"That is just it," broke in Lady Santley. "He 'butts in' almost too often. I hate any one who dominates the conversation so."

"So do I, usually," admitted Helen, "but then there are exceptions. Take Mrs. Van Alstyne, for instance."

"Dear Tessie!" exclaimed Lady Santley. "That is what her friends call her, is n't it? She is a dear, and I am very fond of her. Now, she fits in perfectly. There is one man left——"

"D'Astraluce?" queried Helen. "He is a gentleman in every sense of the word."

"I really adore Beppino," said the other frankly. "He *is* such a gentleman, and one is always sure of him. Why don't you go in for him? He is only forty, he has some money of his own, a house in Rome, and a villa in the Alban Hills. My dear girl, I believe I have the instincts of a matchmaker in me. I am thrilled over the idea. Just think what your position in Roman society would be? You would be *Eccellenza,* and go in to dinner several feet ahead of many of the others. You

see, I am only the widow of a very recent peer, created in the time of George the First—you have no idea how all that sort of thing counts, especially abroad—and with the money you have you would become a great lady, a very great lady, indeed."

"Dear Lady Santley," said Helen in a low tone, as soon as the other's eloquence had subsided, "I don't think I shall ever marry. I have had two offers of marriage. One man I thought I loved, and the other I came near loving—perhaps I did love him—a little; but he is gone—in disgrace, so I must bury his memory, and think no more of—him."

The girl's face was very white as she finished speaking, and a few tears fell on her clasped hands. Helen seemed so quiet that Lady Santley feared to go further at present, so she relapsed into silence.

Ethel had been in correspondence with Maud about Helen, and after Maud had explained the situation in a general way, she asked her sister's advice on the subject. Ethel answered that she was interested, and if the girl came to her, she would see what could be done. Lady Santley had at once seen a resemblance in Helen's story to that of Maud's, except that Helen had never liked the world, and had never before tried to extract any pleasure from it. Helen had spoken of two men who had been devoted to her, but of course there must have been others. Lady Santley knew who the two were, but had had the tact not to mention them, although the name of one had almost escaped her, especially when she had been relating her sister's story.

It was absurd for a young girl to say that she would never marry. Lady Santley had sneered at the account Maud gave her, and had considered Helen's statement

that she had no capacity to love, ridiculous. Lots of girls talked that way, but most of them gave up such nonsense when the right man turned up. But now that Lady Santley had seen and talked with Helen, she saw that some new element would have to intervene to bring about such a result. She must be a woman without a soul. Perhaps the gods, touched by the sight of a heart sterile of love, would have mercy on her, though the girl did not seem much to be pitied by the defection of a disgraced lover. The few tears she shed would do her good, unless she were foolish enough to spoil her complexion by inane emotion. Emotion *per se* was so useless unless one had something to gain by it; but a soul—yes, a soul would make all the difference in the world to Helen, and stir up the whole stagnant depths of her nature. Lady Santley's imagery was becoming mixed, but she already loved Helen, and thought that it would be a pity for her to be buried alive in a hospital. It had been all very well in Maud's case; Lady Santley had accepted that fact long ago. Helen did not have such a reason as Maud's, and it would be absurd to allow her to do it. There were a whole string of emotions which intercourse with the world could give, and Helen should be given every possible chance to run their gamut.

Of course there had been two love affairs important enough to have awakened the girl to some degree of interest; but the one had awakened only pity, which is not love, though it is akin to it; and the other—what effect had the other had on such a nature as Helen's? According to Maud's version, she had swept along unconsciously, and then something had happened. Maud had not been at all clear what it was. Then came Lionel's exposure. But what did the girl really feel

within her? Women are such liars in catechisms, where it is a question of the heart; and often this was so, as Lady Santley herself admitted, because they did not know what they wanted or were unwilling to admit their indecision.

"Helen!"

"Yes, Lady Santley," answered she; "what is it?"

"I am years older than Maud, and consequently centuries older than you," announced Ethel. "I am fond of you both, and am going to be frank with you. I have lived in the world for a long time. I was admitted as a charter member on account of my marriage, and I flatter myself I know it like a book. Let us admit, for the sake of argument, that you are unhappy—it is very becoming to be unhappy if you manage it cleverly; that you are unsatisfied; that, in short, you don't know what you want. Very well—don't answer. I will suppose you have admitted all that. My advice is, go out furiously; that is the best cure for your condition. Take my advice, and be worldly; drink deep until you are filled."

Helen did not answer, and Lady Santley waited with characteristic patience. She knew when to force and when to wait. She was presently rewarded by meeting the critical eye of the other fixed upon her, but soon the young girl's expression softened and fell before the question in her ladyship's.

"Dear Lady Santley," said Helen, speaking quickly, "this has been a very intimate talk, and I have told you a good many things about myself, because I felt instinctively that you are to be trusted. I was sure I could talk as freely to you as I do to Maud, but I don't like to talk about myself; I never have cared to. I must tell you what I have promised mother, though. She

asked me to go out as if I liked it for a year, without giving a thought to the home; and I have promised faithfully to do so. If at the end of that time I find I like hospital work best, she will have no objection to my taking it up as my profession."

"Your mother suggested that!" exclaimed Ethel, hardly attempting to conceal her surprise. "I am glad she is so sensible."

Maud had led Lady Santley to expect a mere worldly puppet in Mrs. Mainwaring, but her request of her daughter made her rise at least fifty per cent. in her ladyship's estimation.

"Yes," answered Helen firmly; "and I intend doing it."

A thought flashed through Ethel's mind as she rose, and she looked curiously at Helen.

Why would not Seward do for her? But no, he was too much engrossed with politics; and besides he was not a marrying man. He was the despair of mothers with marriageable daughters, who sighed for the love which would bring with it a handsome home, a yacht, an opera box, horses, carriages, and automobiles. He was only a few years over forty—perhaps forty-five. What a pity!

"I wish you *would* consider D'Astraluce," Lady Santley remarked aloud, somewhat indifferently. "He would be so satisfactory in every way. Very well; I won't say any more. Heavens!" she exclaimed suddenly, looking up at the clock. "It is almost six o'clock, and Mr. Blatchford should be here by now. I must run down and receive him. You go and lie down until it is time to dress for dinner," she suggested as she led the way out of the room.

A few minutes before dinner Helen descended the stairs and caught sight of a strange man standing by the fire in the drawing-room, talking to his hostess. She entered the room, and shortly afterwards dinner was announced.

Lady Santley presented Mr. Blatchford to her, and before she realized it, she laid her arm in his, and joined the others on their way to the dining-room, beyond.

XXVII

THE grounds of the Villa Bel Respiro were undoubtedly the most beautiful in Cadenabbia; and the foreigners who were privileged to see them at once recognized the subtle difference between the real Italian gardens in their native setting, and those trying replicas which are to be found all over the civilized world. It does not exist in the laying out, or in the disposition of the flowers or statuary, but rather in the individual touch which gives a distinctive tone of its own, though each and every one has a fundamental note which marks it as one of a class. It is the recognition of this distinguishing tone that has made the Italians so successful in their gardens; and the lack of this perception in other nations which has made a failure of their efforts.

It is the acme of good taste in art to conceal makeshifts and yet get an effect which is really artistic. That is the reason why our Italian gardens at home, though often beautiful, are so because of some intrinsic beauty of the statuary, the rich profusion of flowers, or the general finish which is apparent; and so in one instance we get formality, where the more desired effect to be obtained is stateliness. Any one can be formal, but only those who are born to the purple can be stately. Formality is the shield of the socially insecure, but what might be called a groundwork of simplicity becomes stateliness, that resultant attitude which is part and parcel of the nature of those who belong, by feudal right, to the old régime.

The villa was built of stucco, painted pink, with reliefs of white, and resembled, as Lady Armsea said, a

huge cake with trimmings of confectioner's icing. She added that a bride and groom in *papier maché* were all that were needed to complete the effect. The arrangements within were simple, but rich and effective, the general tone being a copy of the French Empire period. The effect was a happy combination of solidity without heaviness, and gracefulness with an undertone of comfort and good taste. Lady Santley had added a few modern touches of her own; and in the homelike hall a comfortable sofa was placed opposite the fireplace, with its back close against a solid table. The drawing-room, being a state room, was more frankly French, and there all was dainty and light, while the adjoining music-room resembled a large arbor with trellised sides. Outside, the awnings over the terrace took away from the old-time appearance, while a suggestion of a very English-looking tennis court, half concealed by a privet hedge, seemed at first blush almost out of keeping.

However, the long French windows, which led out of most of the rooms on the ground floor, gave on to a gravelled terrace; on the side directly above the gardens and towards the lake, a semicircular balustrade in the centre corresponded with the architecture of the villa itself. On one side of this terrace a pergola covered with roses ended in a rose garden to the right; and on the other, steps descended to a lower terrace, and this by means of a flight of steps led down to the main garden. Beyond, a formal stretch of woods, with shady paths running through it, joined eventually with the lake, for the estate had its own lake-front. From the terrace above, leading out from the music-room, stretches and vistas of the water added a touch of great beauty to the whole. On the left side of the garden a little stream fell from basin to basin, in a series of diminutive waterfalls to the lake

below, and thus was completed the resemblance to the famous Villa Lante at Bagnaia, near Viterbo, from which the grounds and gardens were copied, the house in every detail having sprung from Lady Santley's own fertile brain.

The next morning about nine o'clock the window of the music-room stood ajar, and as the awnings had not been lowered, the terrace was already bathed in sunshine, warm and inviting.

The hour was early for any of the inmates of the house to be about, save the Italian servants, who usually rose with the sun, but Helen Mainwaring, fresh as one of the dewy roses which added their dainty beauty to the smaller garden beyond, was returning to the house, stepping carefully on the stone treads of the pergola as she moved slowly on. She wore no hat, but carried a fluffy pink sunshade in one hand and a book of verses in the other. The book had been caught up in passing from the large table in the hall, but she had read only a few of the sonnets therein, which were translations from the Portuguese. She had peeped casually into her book as she sat on the bench among the roses, but the air, redolent with balmy odors, made it impossible to do aught save dream amid the cloying sweetness of the flowers. Finally she had risen and walked leisurely back to the house.

At this moment she was leaving the protection of the pergola and standing in the full glare of the sun. Holding up her sunshade, she stood on the terrace, her gaze, from under a hand raised to shelter her eyes from the glare of sun, idly glancing over the garden, and being drawn finally to a vista where the trees had been trimmed to allow a bird's-eye view of the dancing waters of the lake. Her hand descended until it rested on a small iron table near-by; the lips were parted like a child's, and

her gray eyes, dark in their intensity, looked fixedly away over the garden, alive with the minor droning of bees; over the little stretch of woods, with its iron benches and chairs, its statuary at unexpected points, and its winding walks; away beyond the Lake of Como, with the inscrutable gaze of one inspired, who could read the secret of the future ages.

A firm, masculine step sounded within, then Seward Blatchford stepped out onto the terrace and paused to admire the picture the girl made. But she turned at that moment, her hand falling to her side and her parasol dropping to her shoulder as she changed her position. She regarded him inquiringly with her straight, calm gaze.

"You—Mr. Blatchford!" she exclaimed, with a faint raising of her eyebrows, and an almost imperceptible increase in color made her attitude less ethereal, though she did not move, seeming like some spirit poised for flight. "You are an early bird. I did not know that any one ever appeared before ten."

Blatchford noticed the curve of her inscrutable mouth, the angle of her chin, and the deliberateness of her gaze, and thought what a wonderful picture she made standing there.

"But I am not the first," he answered, smiling, feeling that some response was needed, though her remark had been rather a statement than a question, "for you got ahead of me. I was," he continued, looking out over the terrace, "going for a stroll through the woods——"

"And are you sure you were not going for a swim, incidentally?" she inquired archly.

"I had no intention of doing that," he replied, smiling back at her. "If you had not spoken so quickly, you would have heard me ask you where you were going when

I stepped out so suddenly and interrupted your day-dreams."

"That is a very graceful way of telling me I interrupted you," said Helen. "I can't reply that I 'm going a-milking, because I am hardly dressed for the part; but I was undecided until you suggested woods, and now I believe I shall walk down there for a while. It looks cool and pleasant."

" 'And may I go with you, my pretty maid?' " quoted Seward lightly.

" 'Nobody asked you, sir, she said,' " finished Helen, turning to look provokingly up at him as she descended the steps to the terrace below.

" 'Then will you marry me, my pretty maid?' " And Blatchford leaned forward as if entreating her, though his eyes twinkled.

" 'No, I thank you, sir, she said,' " replied Helen, but her tone was too colorless for him to decipher her mood, and so, as he joined her and walked through the garden, a silence fell which seemed to have risen like a barrier between them. This imagery was Seward's alone, and it was strange he should have been conscious of any difference, as he was not usually subject to such influences. As for Helen, her expression showed that she was unaware of any change either in feeling or manner, and presently the man smiled back at her as she asked him a question.

"Is not this a beautiful garden?" she asked, and at her words he felt the intangible barrier melt away. How foolish to have supposed that such a thing had ever existed! He must be changing into a sentimentalist.

"Yes," he agreed; "and in the sunlight it looks like a dream garden."

Helen and Seward continued to toss back and forth,

lightly and without effort, this fluffy ball of conversation, until at the turn of a path in the woods Helen caught sight of a bench.

"There is a bench. Shall we sit down for a while?" she asked.

When they were seated Seward removed his hat and passed his hand over his forehead. The action was involuntary, and he scarcely knew why he did it.

"Mr. Blatchford," said Helen, somewhat abruptly, "you asked me to marry you a few minutes ago. I know you were only in fun, but—I don't know why I tell you this—I am not a woman who can love——"

Helen had almost added "again," but she checked the word as it hung poised for utterance.

"Why, Miss Mainwaring," exclaimed Seward, turning to her in surprise; but she was looking down and drawing figures with her parasol in the gravel at her feet, her face half turned away from him. "I am not aware that I have said or done anything to force your confidence, though I shall respect it just the same. Of course I was in fun. I am hardly a marrying man. My business is politics, and that is all I live for at present." But his face grew crimson as he remembered his hostess's words when she had bade him good-night the evening before, namely, "Be nice to her. She is indifferent but rich, and would make you a good wife, one who would help you in your work."

"And I am interested in hospital work," said Helen absent-mindedly, looking straight before her and failing to notice the man's confusion, "so we can be friends, after all. So many men fall in love with a woman, or think they do; but I would like to have a man who is merely a friend and not a possible lover. Will you be that friend?"

"I will be your friend," he answered simply.

"I am glad," she replied in a different tone, as if a load had been lifted from her mind. "And now won't you tell me what you were starting to say last night at dinner, just before Lady Santley gave the signal? It was something about politics, I think."

"Some people would consider last night's interruption providential," answered Blatchford, "but I will tell you what it was, though I had no idea women were ever interested in politics."

"Not enough in our country," said Helen, "and not as much as they are in England. I think a woman can be of the greatest service, even if it is only as a listener at first. I have read a good many newspaper articles at times, especially when elections are near, but it is hard to learn the truth when one paper supports one candidate, and the other supports his opponent. It is almost impossible to weed out the truth from such a whirlpool of partisanship. Then, too, it seems to be inevitable that the strongest man—not the best one, however—wins on the principle of the survival of the fittest."

"That is my thought, too!" exclaimed Seward, "only, I go further and say that the strongest is he who stops at nothing which will serve his end. He has no such nice perceptions as his opponent, and he demeans himself, buys votes, bribes and is bribed, until the stench of American politics is a foul plague spot to our neighbors."

"One would almost fear that the evil had gone too deep to be treated successfully," said Helen meditatively; "that, like a cancer, it is eating its destroying way, feeding on the very microbes it employs to do its work."

"Miss Mainwaring!" retorted Seward earnestly, "I shall go on trying until I have accomplished my object.

For the purpose of purifying politics, I intend using one-half of my private fortune, and myself to enter the arena; once there, I shall fight for my cause like the gladiators of old. But forgive me; I have gone too far. You see, it is my hobby, and I am carried away by anger —and, yes, I *have* forgotten myself."

"Mr. Blatchford, how can one help forgetting oneself when such a condition exists?" asked Helen. "What denunciations are strong enough when iron means are necessary to preserve in its integrity the strength of our nation?"

"A politician *per se,* at present, is a collector of spoils, which he uses solely for himself and his own benefit. He is the head, the font, the boss—and that is what he is called. I am not opposed to labor unions in theory, except where they have deteriorated on account of failure in putting their principles into practice; and the fault is not with the union itself, but with the one who dictates to, debauches, and intimidates its members. My efforts shall be spent in bringing about the abolition of bossism, and I shall replace it by an intelligent, fair-minded directorship, which shall look to it that the citizen's rights, private and public, shall be respected."

"It seems to me, Mr. Blatchford," remarked Helen, "that a great many evils can be robbed of their evil characteristics by the means you suggest, and turned into blessings."

"Yes, Miss Mainwaring, I am sure of it," said Seward. "Take strikes, for instance. If one could fairly canvass the individual wishes of a body of workers who do not merely decide to stop work on account of grievances, but because they are compelled to do so by violence or threats, how many men would one be able to count out of the whole as really in sympathy with the movement?

You would find the percentage small. Put a good, clean man at the head of the labor interests, and capital will always arbitrate. But capital must be purified, too, and we must no longer hear the cry of tainted money in our free country. Take the increase of crime now. Is not each policeman a boss, and is it not due to his efforts whether crime lessens or increases? He is vulnerable and therefore human. Put a clean man at the head of the police, and he will see to it that there is no bribery among his minions. By means of legislation, fairly directed and earnestly intended to cure, such arrant protection of vice as gambling dens, policy shops, and the like, will be made impossible; for such protection shall be illegal and punishable by heavy fines, imprisonments, or both. It is time for a change, and the change must be radical and sure. But it must be peaceful, for I wish to avoid conflicts in politics as well as in other fields, some of them just next door. Think of a conflict between capital and labor! It would be long and bloody, but capital, with the superior force at its disposal, must inevitably crush its adversary to the wall."

Helen was silent for a space, pondering his words. Her hands were clasped tightly before her, and she was looking into space. Seward watched her curiously.

"You have a wonderful task before you," she said at last, speaking in a monotone; "and somehow I think we have something in common, for in my hospital work we strive to be clean and aseptic, and for our own glory we are trying to cure sick people. You, too, are trying by modern methods of honesty to cure men and take away the evil which clogs their souls."

Seward looked at the earnest face and sighed. He could not speak at this moment, for the lovely profile turned towards him forbade and silenced him. He

sighed again, for the memory of those clear-cut features he knew would remain in his heart for many a long day.

Helen looked up suddenly, mentally and physically shook herself, and rose to her feet.

"Come, Mr. Blatchford, we had better wend our way back to the villa," she said.

And so these two, who for a space had drifted into intimacy, walked back in silence, as they had come; but the barrier which one fancied had previously arisen was gone. For a time they walked together, and, though materially they were apart for the next few months, both asked themselves over and over again what element could knit together their several interests and make them into one common one. But the woman was soul-dumb and could not answer; while the man tried to deceive himself by fancying he could not read the solution.

When they came again to the gravel terrace, Helen sat down and became part of the group gathered there. Seward went into the hall to leave his hat, and as he passed the table he saw a cablegram lying there. It was from New York and read thus: "Come back at once—Scrimmins." And the politician sighed again. But presently he thrust the yellow envelope and its enclosure into his pocket, and returned to the terrace.

XXVIII

AS MRS. WAINWARING had a cold, Helen decided to stay at home with her; so she missed the picnic which took place the next day. She did not come down-stairs until after the party had left, and sat with her mother in the sheltered rose-garden during the early part of the afternoon. Later on, she walked through the woods down to the water's edge, then on her return wrote letters, and read to her mother, until she found she had just time to dress for dinner.

The evening before, whilst the last rubber of bridge was being played, a question had presented itself in reference to the conversation she had had with Mr. Blatchford earlier in the day. She looked about for him, but as he had left the room, she did not have an opportunity of satisfying herself, and did not see him again that evening. He was probably in the smoke-room when she had gone up to bed, so she determined to see him in the morning, before the party started. Her mother's illness, though slight, detained her; and so the chance was gone. She had intended to go down a little while before dinner, but she was almost fifteen minutes late, and the rest of the guests were already assembled when she went in. It was a dinner of forty, for Lady Santley with her usual energy had scoured the hotels, the other villas, and the by-ways, in search of guests.

As dinner was announced immediately after Helen had made her hurried entrance, she found herself taken in by Baron d'Hautaleure, a Belgian attaché in Rome; and when the guests were seated Reggy Beauchamp beamed at her from the other side. As d'Hautaleure im-

mediately engaged her in conversation, it happened that for the moment she scarcely had a chance to see who the other guests were.

He was a pleasant, chatty little man, who had a way of introducing his own subjects without waiting to see whether they would be interesting to the person he was talking to.

"Having travelled in Japan for two months, I can tell you a great deal about it," he said, and proceeded to do so. Helen looked furtively about her, while Yves d'Hautaleure rattled on.

"Yes," ventured Helen, seeking the thread of his conversation, which she had momentarily lost sight of, "and now I must hear about the geishas. They are very beautiful and fascinating, I believe." And the conversation, which had been on the verge of failing, went serenely on, d'Hautaleure for the most part maintaining it himself, leaving to Helen a varied choice of rejoinders, which either punctuated his periods or else helped him past a pause. Helen wished to avoid this contingency until Reggy, whom she had met some years ago, could tear himself away from his partner and talk to her.

Presently she caught a question being asked some distance down the table:

"Seward has gone, has he not?"

"Yes, he got a cable; gone to the States. Some new move in the political game, I suppose." Lady Armsea, who had answered the question, smiled fatuously on Barry, who was next to her.

Helen turned quickly to the baron, saying enthusiastically:

"How well you tell it! But I must not deprive the high-born next to you of your charming society," and she tapped him lightly on his small hand with her fan,

and turned to Reggy, who happened to become free at this moment.

"The Honorable Reginald should not laugh too soon," she remarked. "Who is she? Who are all the rest? I am stopping here, so you can leave out the house-party."

"She is a Mrs. Laniger from Pittsburg," began Reggy. "Very rich and anxious to remarry, but she 's not in my class. That other female is a Mrs. Tremayne Bellairs; that 's Berty Roderick next; then one of yours —the house-party, you know—Lütgow; Marchese Spinelli; one of yours next; Cyril Maidstone, with that rippin' little Betty Marsden, who 's a widow—would you ever think it?—then D'Astraluce next to the Armsea; Barry, you know, one of yours; then Ethel, God bless her!—long may she wave! How many is that? I've lost count. Well, however, there 's Mimi Rosedale; have n't seen her for years; thought she 'd kicked—that 's some of your slang. The rest are rotters; I don't know who they are."

"You are a directory, a 'Burke' and 'Who 's Who' rolled into one," laughed Helen; and then more seriously: "Just go on talking to me softly, or pretend to, as I wish to think out something."

"Why not think in chorus, soft and low?" said Reggy in a tone of banter.

"Oh, it 's too serious for that, and, besides, if I did ask you a question, you might not be able to answer it. Please do what I say, and I 'll reward you later." By which it will be seen that Helen was learning to play a part in her world with considerable facility. "Now let us begin."

Reggy's method of talking to her softly was to hum over in a low tone the music-hall songs, which he had heard before he came abroad. This was slightly discon-

certing, as she wished to consider definitely whether she felt really disappointed because Blatchford had gone. There must have been some very important news to take him away so suddenly. She had only seen him for eight days, but she had been greatly interested in his schemes for reform. She had wanted to hear further whether he would take an active part in the coming struggle; she supposed he would, as he said he himself would enter the arena.

She could easily imagine him like unto the gladiators of old, striving among the beasts, fighting nobly in defence of his creed. A man of great personal beauty, erect, smart, and manly, he would win the struggle for supremacy against his foes. Men of his stamp always won. Straight as an arrow, with small head, closely-cut curly hair, straight regular features, an air of indomitable strength, a slight but powerful figure—all these attributes were the stuff of which heroes were made. And now—he was gone. His departure had been very sudden, and she wished she could have found out before he left more about what he was going to do, and how he intended doing it. He had given her a new thought, a new interest——

"Who 'll sty at'ome to mind the biby?" sang Beauchamp, in a low tone of contentment.

"How do you suppose I can think about—what I was trying to think about, if you keep up that tiresome tune? Really, you are insufferable!"

"Come to any definite conclusions?" drawled Reggy good-humoredly. "If not—perhaps I could help you. Some fellow in the case, eh?"

"No, certainly not," retorted Helen, and then, realizing that Beauchamp was just a good-natured, overgrown boy, she smiled. "I was thinking about Mr. Blatchford,"

she explained. "He told me many things about reform while he was here, and I had so many questions to ask him. I am sorry he is gone."

"Oh, the politics man!" exclaimed Reggy. "He 's as dry as a bone. I heard him speak at some bally political dinner at the Annerly's—all about statistics, police, strikes, and all that sort of beastly rot. Reform! The only way to reform is to keep away from the bar. 'Leave the can alone, and never smile no more,'" he added sententiously.

"I knew you could n't be serious," said Helen. "Have you ever really been in earnest about anything?"

"Yes, I 'm quite solemn at a melodrama," answered he; "have to be. There was a 'rip-snorter' at the Alcazar. All about blood, stealing, murder, and sudden death. We had the whole show. I tell you I was serious then."

"The reform I mean," explained Helen, "is reform in politics, reform at elections, reform in the police——"

"Better write to the Times," remarked Reggy. "I always do, though I don't know if it really does much good. Don't believe anything but dynamite would move any of the political big-bugs."

"Now, that is rank anarchism," said Helen, whom it had taken but a few minutes to discover that Reginald Beauchamp had not changed much since she had met him several years ago in Berlin. "I won't hear it, even. Tell me what you go in for?"

"Horses and racing," was the decided answer. "Never missed any of the big meets yet. Never will."

Though she did not feel in the mood, Helen forced herself to listen to a varied account of the different races he had been to, the horses he had bet on, the amounts he had booked and lost, until with a sigh of relief she saw

her hostess make the move, so she could rise and escape with the rest.

In the drawing-room d'Hautaleure made her a formal little speech, then with a still more formal inclination and a click of his heels he was off. Lady Santley presently paused beside her.

"My dear, I 've told Tessie—she said I could call her that—to look after my guests, as I felt I must have a quarter of an hour to myself, so you and I will just stroll out into the garden together. It 's a heavenly night, and I must get away from all that." She paused at the threshold of the long window leading out of the music-room, and waved vaguely back in the direction of the hall. "Sometimes I get horribly tired of people. I love to have them come, I adore arranging entertainments for them, but when I get them all together I suddenly get bored and feel that I must get away. I suppose it 's the remains of my American nerves," she added as she entered the garden and drew Helen's arm through hers. "I think we had better stroll about, as we have no wraps, for Italy is n't England or home, you know."

"It is a beautiful night," said Helen enthusiastically. "But, dear Lady Santley, why did you bring me out here?"

"What a strange question, Helen!" exclaimed Ethel. "Did n't you want to come? You may go back if you wish to."

"I don't mean that," interposed Helen apologetically, "but you must have had some reason, some object——"

"I believe you are really suspicious of me," said her ladyship, laughing, "and that you think I dragged you out here intentionally. My only purpose was to have a companion—and you were handy."

"I am sorry I made you think I questioned your mo-

tives," said Helen, "but I am so accustomed to having mother——"

"How is your mother?" interrupted Lady Santley. "Has she any fever? No? Well, I am glad of that. She had better see Dr. Falconieri to-morrow, if she is not better; or, I 'll call in Dr. Gregory, who is English and lives at Varese. But I prefer the Italian doctors in Italy. They know the climate so well. Oh, Helen, I have a message for you. Mr. Blatchford told me to say good-bye to you for him. He was called away suddenly—some political business. He has been directing in the dark so far, and he is going home to see if it will be necessary to disclose himself yet. He thought you very intelligent, he told me. You made an impression, but—don't build any air-castles on that. He asked if I thought you would mind his writing, and I said I 'd mention it to you. I shall be writing to him in a few days, and—I would say yes, if I were you."

"I am sorry he is gone, because I found him interesting," said Helen; "but I don't believe he will find time to write. He may find things in such bad shape that he will be able to do nothing definite for some time. I confess," continued Helen, "I did not have any idea he was going away so soon, and I was surprised, for the first news of his departure I received was a casual remark of Lady Armsea's, saying he had actually left."

Lady Santley tried to read a suspicion of more than regret in the tone of the young girl, but the only emotion seemed to be a species of disappointment at the loss of a friend, who had aroused her interest in his work. Was Helen, after all, merely the calm, unimpressionable creature Maud had told her to expect. It seemed so, for the girl seemed as unmoved as if she had merely mislaid a book, which she had found instructive.

"Seward is wrapped up in his schemes, but I hope they are not too visionary to bring about a good result," Ethel murmured. "I should take it as a compliment, if I were you, that he talked so freely to me about it. You know, Helen, sometimes I am a little afraid of you. For instance, I never mention a man, that you do not shrink away from me, not actually, but in spirit. A true man friend is a good thing for any woman to have, and you need never fear that this one will fail you. And now, what shall I say to Mr. Blatchford?"

"Tell him, I shall be glad to have him write, when he has time. I only wish he had asked me himself." And Helen looked away, for she did not feel inclined, for some inexplicable reason, to meet Lady Santley's cold blue eyes, which she knew were fixed on her at this minute.

"My dear," said the other kindly, "you will never regret making a friend of Seward, and this will be a proof that you have done so. I somehow feel you two could help each other," she added in an undertone, as if she had forgotten that the young girl was listening or even there. But she went no further, not daring to give Helen an inkling that she was using her match-making proclivities to further her own ends. She had set her heart on working out the problem of this young girl's happiness, and though Helen had been at first the merest idle study, she had become, as Ethel learned to know her, a problem to work out, whose difficulty made it all the more desirable to solve.

"Helen," she said aloud, following out her train of thoughts, "Maud wrote to me about you, as I have already told you, and she spoke so affectionately of you! Since I have learned to know you, I feel that you are very well worth developing. You have too many fine

qualities for any one who loves you to allow them to go to seed. You have a fine mind, and you are beautiful; but your soul still sleeps, and when it awakes you will find that there are several things existent which you never yet dreamed of, the quickening of which will bring you to a realization of all that you are losing now. You are asleep yet, but I feel that the day of awakening must dawn, and then you will first know happiness; but you will not recognize it until you have found it and—learned its worth," she ended in a low voice.

"I do not understand, dear Lady Santley," and Helen uttered the words timidly. "You speak in parables——"

"Things which are subtle must be expressed with a muffled meaning," explained Ethel quietly; "for the action of such an ethereal essence as the soul must be vague and indefinable. The final result of its action is clear, but its cause is abstract and subject to different interpretations."

"Do you think that one of the results will be that love will come to me?" asked Helen tremulously.

"My dear girl, how can I say?" replied Lady Santley, looking at Helen in apparent surprise. "I am not a magician. You will either fall in love or you won't. You may marry or you may not. You may devote yourself either to the world or to the hospital, or both. On the other hand, you may find a new interest which will be greater than all the rest. You see, Helen, it does not make much difference what you do, provided you are happy. It 's a short life, my dear, and you might as well make it a merry one. My advice to you is, just to drift for the present and enjoy yourself, taking no heed of the morrow. If you find you are really interested in

politics, read the papers. Election time is approaching, and the newspapers should not be dull reading."

"You seem to think that his schemes are too radical," ventured Helen; and then as the other did not reply: "or you would speak with more confidence of his ultimate success."

"My dear, I am not prepared to make a definite prophecy, but I have lived long enough to know that success and failure are correlated terms. One often hears that a man has succeeded or that he has failed. If he succeeds, every one says he deserved it. If, on the other hand, he fails, perhaps ignominiously, every one says that he lost touch with the practical side by his blind devotion, and so on. I don't know what Mr. Blatchford will really do, but I know he is in earnest, though his schemes for reform are rather far-reaching. Still we must hope for the best."

"I wish you were more sanguine, dear Lady Santley," said Helen.

"And I must reply," reiterated the other, "that I am not a magician; and now we must talk of something else before we go in. No, it is not time to join that mob in there. Tessie adores managing people. I have no doubt that this evening is *nuts* for her and she is having the best time she ever had. What are you going to do when you break my heart by leaving Bel Respiro?"

"We shall go to Rome, I think," answered Helen. "I have always wanted to spend a winter there, and now that I really like going out more than I ever did before —it 's been heavenly here—why, I hope I can induce mother to stay on. If she is better, we must be moving on to-morrow. I want to go to Milan or Florence first, and perhaps see something more of the Italian lakes; that

will not give us much time if we are to reach Rome in October, as I have always planned."

Lady Santley was silent, for she wished she could throw over the host of engagements she had promised to fulfil, and do the same thing. But it was impossible; there were visits to make at a number of country houses, a part of the winter on Lord Mowbray's yacht, the spring in Paris, and the distant season to look forward to; so it was quite impossible to consider it.

"What makes people fall in love with each other?" asked Helen abruptly.

"What?" exclaimed her ladyship, somewhat startled by the suddenness of the query. "I don't know—environment, propinquity, or perhaps the overwhelming feeling that one finds that one cannot get on without the other. Now we *must* go in."

"Yes, I suppose we must," replied Helen. "I must tell you how much I have enjoyed my visit here. It has done me lots of good, and I have adored every moment of it. Somehow, I begin to feel like the 'Wandering Jew,' and that I must push on. It is a pity Americans haven't more balance."

"Yes," admitted Lady Santley grudgingly, as if it were a mere side issue, as they moved on slowly to the villa, blazing with light. "I am glad you have enjoyed yourself. It has been a great pleasure to me to have you. Rome," she mused, as they reached the terrace. "Rome," she repeated, aloud. "D'Astraluce ought to do a great deal for you there. I shall speak to him about it. He has a sister established in Rome, who married an Austrian. They are in diplomacy, but she is a very great lady."

Then she turned to Helen and kissed her warmly before they entered the house. It was their real good-bye,

and Helen thought very kindly in the days and years to come of the large-hearted, worldly woman who had listened to her so sympathetically.

Lady Santley, too, often remembered the young girl, and wondered more than once if the seed she had planted would ever germinate in her dormant soul to the warmth of life and happiness. It had been sown in Italy, the land of sentiment. Would it ever blossom forth, ripened by the sun of love, into the perfect flower of pure desire? "Heavens! what an old sentimentalist I am becoming!" thought she, as she smiled scornfully. "It must be the effect of the climate."

XXIX

HÔTEL DE LA VILLE, Florence, September 29th, 19—

Dear Maud: I have been meaning to write you for a long time, but since we left Paris I have not had a moment, and I did not want to send you a measly line only.

We motored down from Paris, stopped a few days at Aix, and then went on to Cadenabbia. There we met Mrs. Van Alstyne, and we all drove up to the villa and left your letter. It was awfully sweet of you to think of us. We had a delightful time, and your sister could not do enough for us. I never saw such an energetic woman. I should think she would get tired of giving people a good time. I don't think I was quiet for an instant, as we were doing things all the while; but I did not get tired. I played bridge a great deal and won at first, but lost almost all of it at the end of the week. I was nearly four hundred francs ahead at one time, and only ten ahead the last evening.

Your sister was so kind to me, and encouraged me to talk freely to her. I have never been so cleverly drawn out in my life, and she was very sympathetic. Just like you, dear. Of course she tried to marry me off to each of the unattached men of the house-party in turn; but I told her I did not see my way clear towards loving any of them. So she smiled and said it was of no consequence. Was n't that just like her? Among others, I met a Mr. Seward Blatchford, who has since gone to New York. He was at Cadenabbia for only a short time, but he was very interesting and told me all about his plans for reforming politics. I had no idea the situation was so serious. He had studied the facts so that he could refute all the arguments of those in power now by statistics. He is such a good-looking man, so well-groomed; and it is a mercy that politics is going to have a clean, honest gentleman to reform it. I was very much impressed by his earnestness. He has a very strong and commanding personality, and I feel sure he will either win or at least we shall hear a good deal of him. Lady Santley likes him, too; but she impressed it on

me in her funny way that he was not a marrying man, so *you* need not get unduly excited. Your sister said that he wanted to write to me. Men do that kind of thing so often that I believe it becomes a habit with them. Often we women interest them for the moment, but it is usually a case of "ships that pass in the night." Still he was awfully nice, and now he has gone out of my life, forever; so that is over. We met, stopped to exchange signals, salute, and then sailed away in opposite directions. I don't believe he will write to me at all; and I am quite certain we shall not meet again. I was the heroine of an imaginary romance invented by Lady Ethel, for just eight days; but at the end of that time it ended very tamely. He went away without even seeing me, leaving only a formal good-bye. I am no nearer loving any one than I was before.

I had to write to Stephen after all and tell him I could not marry him. It was better not to lead him on. I received a letter from him in reply, and he *is* a gentleman. He behaved so beautifully. He said he was to be in Vienna for three years, and was studying hard at his music. He intended to make a success of it, and he closed by saying that he would always love me. Is n't that wonderful?

Have you ever heard anything more of that unfortunate Lionel? I have often wondered what became of him. I am afraid I cared for him just a little—as much as I shall ever care for any man. I don't understand it myself. I felt sometimes as if he must have hypnotized me.

I have promised mother to try and really like the world, and not think about the home for a year. You know last winter I did go out, but it bored me. Aix was very gay, and Cadenabbia too, and I expect to be in Rome this winter, where we shall go about a good deal. Ethel Santley had the Duca D'Astraluce staying at the villa; he is last of the Gortizzi family—you remember they are the ones who always boast of being descendants of the Medicis. However, he has been most kind, and begs us to let him know when we get to Rome. He has a sister who is married to the Austrian ambassador to the King, Prince Ortenlohe-Alteburg, so we should have an opportunity of seeing some of the best society. It will be most exciting to see some of the great people there; and there are, I hear, to be a very nice lot of Americans and English in Rome this winter. Imagine me as a very proper *jeune fille!* I am sure you can't.

Mrs. Van Alstyne is sailing next Tuesday, and goes to spend a few weeks with the Hamilton-Martins. Rita Van Courtland is here. I haven't seen her since she met that bogus Count Ian Paprika, whose real name turned out to be John Sweeney, became engaged to him, and then threw him over, all in the same week. I am sure there are a thousand and one things I want to say still, but I can't remember them now. However, we are going to Rome to-morrow, and I shall wait to finish this there. Please send me any newspapers with good articles about the elections. I am anxious to hear how the political fight goes on; so don't forget to send me everything you can lay your hands on. I think I shall end by going into politics myself. I believe there are some positions open to women. I wonder if New York will ever give the franchise to us! . . .

Helen had just put away the unfinished letter in her writing portfolio when her mother came in.

"My dear," she said, "here is a telegram from Pesotti at the Hotel Excelsior in Rome, saying our rooms will be ready for us to-morrow. Antoine says we should start to-day after lunch, if we are to reach Perugia to-night; and then we can go on to Rome to-morrow. I have wired to Rome, also to Brufani's in Perugia. The servants will leave to-night, so as to have our trunks unpacked and everything ready for us when we arrive. Of course I suppose we could get through to Rome from here in one day, but it makes a long day; and, besides, we would have to go fast, Antoine says. You know how it frightens me to do that, and so I have made all the arrangements as I say."

"I am so glad that we are going down by motor-car," said Helen. "I was afraid you were getting tired of it. I think it is the only possible way to see the country."

"I am glad that you like it, dear," smiled Mrs. Mainwaring, "as it keeps you out in the open air so much, and that is good for you; but the car is beginning to lose its

charm for me, and when we reach Rome I may send it back to Paris."

"I have only my hat, veil, and furs to put on," remarked Helen; "I am glad we are leaving to-day, for I am tired of sight-seeing here, and if we remained another day I should have to go and have a last peep at the 'Uffizi.' "

"Yes, I suppose you would," sighed her mother; "but even if it is tiring, it is wonderful."

That evening, without any serious mishap, the ladies arrived in Perugia. The following morning they left for Rome, stopping to see Assisi and Orvieto on the way.

Before she went to bed that night Helen wrote a line to D'Astraluce, telling him of their arrival in Rome; and the next afternoon the Duke, accompanied by his sister and his brother-in-law, not only left their cards, but inquired if the ladies were receiving. Hearing that they were, the party was shown up with a great deal of ceremony, and after the introductions were made Mrs. Mainwaring rang for tea.

"You are delightfully situated here," remarked the ambassador suavely. "Such a lovely outlook, and so convenient! I am glad you came early, for you will be able to make friends better now, and later you will go to dinners at the Grand Hôtel and to balls or receptions in the old palaces."

"I hope you and your daughter," said the princess, "will do us the honor of coming to our *ricevimento* next week. I am old Roman, but my husband is here for the first time, and so we give our first reception to the Roman world. It will be curious to receive all my old friends so, whom I know all my life, but officially I know them not yet."

"It is very kind of you," said Mrs. Mainwaring. "My daughter and I will come with a great deal of pleasure. We thank you sincerely, but I think I should add our thanks to your brother, too."

"Not at all," said D'Astraluce. "You and your charming daughter would be welcome here without my intervention. My sister was glad to know of your arrival. Her friends and mine are mutual."

Presently the princess moved nearer to the tea table, and D'Astraluce handed cups of tea and cakes to the others; so Helen found herself talking to the ambassador.

"Yes, I have lived a great deal in Vienna," he was saying. "It is my home, but in my official capacity I have much travelled."

"I don't suppose there are many people in Rome yet?" inquired Mrs. Mainwaring.

"Not many," answered the princess, "though many live in villas near; but most of the official people are here. I love Rome at this time of year. Many of the Romans will come here soon now," she added, with a simplicity of manner which was charming.

"It is hard for me to realize that I shall not have as much liberty here as at home," said Helen laughing. "I think it is better to have a little more license combined with confidence, than no license where there can be no trust, on account of the prejudices of tradition."

"That is very advanced, my dear young lady."

"I am glad you will come next Tuesday," said the princess rising. "I will then send the cards to you. *A rivederla.*"

Helen, remembering that she was supposed to be a very young girl, curtesied to the princess, and shook hands rather formally with her husband.

D'Astraluce, who was the last to go, said that he

would put himself at their disposal to escort them to his sister's reception, and would do his friends the honor of presenting them to the two ladies.

When he had followed the others out, Helen suggested that as the carriage was at the door they should take a drive in the Pincio.

The carriage moved down the Via Veneto, across the Piazza Barberini, turned up the Via Sistina, and with a dash passed by the Trinità de' Monti, going at a smart pace along the avenue which led to the Pincio. At the corner the coachman slowed up, and Helen directed him to make the turn about the top of the hill.

"Helen, my dear," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "was n't Lady Santley delightful? I never saw such a wonderful combination of worldliness and large-heartedness in my life. It was really extraordinary. I cared for Lady Armsea least of all, and that Fitzgerald man was merely an effeminate weakling. The Lütgows were very pleasant, though she was dullish. I am so glad we met the Duke there. He is such a gentleman, and is, I feel sure, disposed to be nice to us," she added ingenuously.

"I like him very much," admitted Helen, "and I am glad he thinks well of us. He knows everybody, and his sister is very much in it, so we should have an exceptionally good time here."

"Helen dear," asked Mrs. Mainwaring, trying to speak casually, "you seem to like going about much better than you did? I thought you appeared genuinely pleased with the prospect of a winter here. Is it true?"

"Yes, mother," replied Helen; "I find it is no effort now to enjoy myself. I suppose I am finding it easier here though, compared with what it will be at home. I have not thought of the hospital much, and shall not do so again until we go home—and then not, I think, as

much as before. I intend to keep my promise to you faithfully, unless something unforeseen occurs to force me to change my mind."

"What could happen, my dear?" asked her mother curiously.

"I don't know. I don't believe anything will happen. How you catch me up!" and Helen for the first time since they had left New York was impatient with her mother.

Mrs. Mainwaring, fearing to increase rather than lessen the effect of the girl's sudden silence by talking as if nothing had happened, gradually ceased speaking until they returned to the hotel.

"I hope you enjoyed the drive, my dear?" asked Mrs. Mainwaring in a kindly tone, without making it too solicitous.

"Yes, mother, it was very pleasant." But the girl's tone was too even to mean anything definite; and the mother, feeling it hard to avoid asking what was the matter, stood at the door of the sitting-room, sighing softly, as she watched the girl walk listlessly down the corridor in the direction of her room.

XXX

ONE afternoon, as Helen was alone in the sitting-room at their hotel in Rome, a card was handed to her. It was Rose who asked if Miss Mainwaring would see her. When the door opened and a woman in black appeared, Helen advanced to meet her.

"I am so glad to see you again," she said cordially, and held out her hand. "Where on earth have you been?"

"Wait," said the other quietly. "Let me tell my story first; then, if you wish it, I will give you my hand."

"I don't understand," replied Helen wonderingly; "but sit down, and tell me what is the matter. You look ill and white."

"I am not ill, but I am tired, weary unto death," began the other listlessly; then nervously, "we shall not be disturbed, shall we? I have something to say, and it is for your ear alone."

Helen reassured her, and prepared to listen to the wretched woman's story. The strange recital, which fell dully at times, and at others feverishly, from Rose's colorless lips, both fascinated and repelled her, but when Miss Barstow told her of Lionel's death she turned suddenly white. Recovering herself finally by a superhuman effort, she leaned forward.

"Dead!" she exclaimed in horror. "Where—where is he buried?"

"In Sicily, near where we lived for so long," answered Rose in a dull voice. "He lies in the English cemetery —on the road to Acquasanta."

Both women were silent until Helen looked up again suddenly.

"How sad!" she said, her voice not quite steady, for she had been strangely moved. "But," she continued, "how do you happen to be here, and how did you find out we had come?"

"I came to Rome a few days ago," was the answer, "and I shall enter the convent soon. I am going to begin my novitiate at Santa Eufemia next week. I saw your names on the register here."

"I had forgotten you were a Catholic," said Helen. "But, tell me—were you with him at the end?"

"No," answered Rose, "he died alone."

"But you cared for him?" Helen forced herself to ask; "you helped him to live, you—you loved him?"

"Yes, I loved him beyond all else. You could not understand such love. But I can love no more, for my heart is dead and lies buried with him in his far-off grave."

"You were near him when he was suffering. You were of use to him. You loved him. You sacrificed yourself —but you are wrong!" cried Helen passionately. "I *do* understand. You were doing more than your duty. You were standing in the pathway which love had made. You did more. You were following the footsteps ordained by love itself."

"Can you take my hand now? It would comfort me to know that you understand, before we say good-bye forever."

Helen quietly held out her hand, which Rose grasped eagerly.

"I ask your forgiveness," Miss Barstow continued feverishly, "because I once thought you loved him. I thought you were standing in my way."

"There is nothing to forgive," said Helen tremulously, and was silent.

Long after Rose had taken her departure, Helen sat quietly looking out of the window. When it grew dark, she groped her way across the room and switched on the electric light. She heard her mother moving about in the next room, and called out to her. Hearing her voice, Mrs. Mainwaring opened the door.

"What is it, Helen," she asked.

"Nothing," the girl answered gently. "You look tired, so let us just have something to eat up-stairs. It is such a bore to have to get dressed, and I don't feel equal to sitting through one of those interminable dinners."

Helen passed a restless night and awoke early next morning. After what seemed an interminable interval she got out of bed to unlock the door and admit her maid, who brought in her tea and toast to her. Two letters were staring at her from the tray, too; one bulky, with twenty-five centimes to pay for insufficient postage, from New York; the other thin, with an Italian stamp and post-marked Genoa. Helen drank her tea, nibbled a piece of toast, and then, taking up the thinnest of the two letters, broke the seal. It was only a note of good-bye from Mrs. Van Alstyne, who was sailing the next day for New York, and who wished, as she wrote in closing, "that you and your mother were going on the same steamer with me, as I hate to feel that we are going to be separated for so long."

Miss Mainwaring destroyed the envelope, but kept the letter to show her mother later.

"Brixton, please take away the tray," she said, "I am finished with it. No, leave the long envelope; I have n't read it yet."

It contained a thick enclosure, but the letter-head bore

the name of Willard Deane, an attorney-at-law on Broadway.

NEW YORK, September ——

Miss Helen Mainwaring, Care of —— ——

Dear Madam: I herewith enclose a letter from Mr. Carrington, also a copy of his will, with certificate of his death, at Valdese, near Palermo, Sicily, on September ——. As one of the legatees under the will, will you advise me at your earliest convenience of your acceptance of the conditions of said legacy, so that as soon afterwards as the estate shall be adjudicated I may make payment of the money due you? Yours truly,

Willard Deane, Executor.

Helen read the letter, glanced over the will, and when it came to the clause concerning herself she made out the short sentence through a mist of tears.

"He trusted me," she murmured. "Of course I accept, but I must talk this over with mother. I must beg her to let me do as I want, for I will not give up the world, I will—Brixton," she said aloud, "tell me when Mrs. Mainwaring is awake. What is that?"

"Another letter and some newspapers," answered Brixton, taking them from a diminutive and rather frightened-looking page at the door. She handed them to her mistress and withdrew, closing the door behind her.

Helen opened the letter. It was from Seward Blatchford. "He was sailing from Cherbourg that afternoon, and sent this little line of good-bye, also some newspapers which might interest her. In the meanwhile he trusted that all was well with her. He had been sorry to leave Cadenabbia so suddenly, but in order to catch the first German steamer——"

Helen read the leading articles of the newspapers. A great deal was said about a new man, a dark horse in the field, whose name would be announced in the near future. No one could tell the strength of the new Independents,

as they had not disclosed their hand yet. The offices in dispute remained so, except the office of governor of the State of New York, which was definitely claimed by the new party. Cartoons more or less discreditable to the opposing candidate were in prominent positions. One of them represented the Democratic candidate in rags, with the face of a burglar; above him in a flaming car appeared a splendid man, the god in the car. From his mouth poured forth fire, supposed to represent the unknown's denunciations of his political foe, who was fleeing in terror, casting glances behind him.

"What a game it is, this game of politics!" she said. "But Blatchford will show them a new way of playing it. Under his tutelage prizes shall not be won by cheating; everything will be above-board, and each participant shall be forced to stand forth openly."

Helen could not abide anything underhand herself, could not understand unfairness, dishonesty, or, even worse, lying; and she could so well comprehend how he loathed such things too, and knew how sincere he was when he determined to use honest, clean money to exterminate them.

Mrs. Mainwaring opened the door of communication between the two rooms at this moment.

"Brixton said you wanted to see me, my dear," she said, "and I thought I would come in to you at once. What is it? Are you not well?"

"Yes, mother, I am well, but I have had a bad night—and I am tired. Will you read these, and tell me what you wish me to do? I have no thoughts of my own, since I promised you not to think of the home or its affairs." And Helen held out Deane's letter and the copy of the will for her mother to read.

When she had done so, Mrs. Mainwaring looked up.

"What do you wish to do?" she asked quietly.

"Dear mother, I should like to accept," answered Helen frankly; "but I wish to ask your advice as to what is best. It makes little or no difference what I do; the testator chose me first, but if I fail then Maud is to carry out his wishes."

"Helen," asked Mrs. Mainwaring abruptly, "was there ever anything between you and Lionel Carrington?"

"Are you afraid that I would deceive you?" asked Helen scornfully. "Have you so little faith in me? Oh, mother, why do you look at me so strangely? Why cannot you let what is past be? Would it have been such a crime if I had—loved him? Why do you force me to answer such a question. I have never heard you speak so before, and your words, your attitude, make me think——"

"Dear, that is called a guilty conscience."

"No, it is not, because I am not ashamed," exclaimed Helen passionately; "for I believe that in my way I loved the superintendent. The man himself, however, made it impossible for me to—care for him."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, mother, and I wish to ask now if you have any serious objection to my using this money for the purpose he intended? It is the least I can do for the memory of the official who loved his work."

"I do not understand, Helen," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "how you, a woman of intelligence, can attempt to split hairs with me, and think for one moment you are deceiving me."

"Perhaps I am deceiving myself," said Helen slowly. "It makes very little difference though about the point

of view we either of us take, for—he is dead. Perhaps it was conscience with him at the end, for he—loved me in his way; and though I think it was a selfish way, this trust makes it appear better than I thought. I think there might have been some good in the man if he had had a helping hand held out to save him before it was too late."

"I don't know what to think," began Mrs. Mainwaring, "except that you have disappointed me sadly. I am in a quandary—but I must find a way out. I am inclined to think you had better accept this money. You would be merely giving a healthy interest in the present instance, instead of a morbid one. I hope I shall not regret my decision, but I give my consent to your receiving this money to use for the purpose for which it was intended."

"Thank you, mother," said Helen quietly. "I promise you you will not regret your decision. Now I want to ask a favor of you. I am homesick, and I wish you would take me home."

"Very well, dear," agreed Mrs. Mainwaring, sighing. "I think it better for you to go home if you want to. The sea voyage will do you good; and, besides, if you are not well, it would be better to have our own doctor come to see you, as I don't trust these foreign physicians."

"But I am not ill," protested Helen. "I am not even unhappy now; I only long for—home."

"Very good, my dear," said Mrs. Mainwaring soothingly. "Just rest quietly until dinner, and I shall make all the arrangements. We are dining with Rita de Steuben to-morrow, go to the reception afterwards—for I should hate to offend D'Astraluce or his sister—and then start homewards."

Helen waited until her mother had returned to her

own room, and then, drawing forth the sheaf of newspapers which she had thrust under her pillow, sighed as she hunted for another article to read.

"I have gained a victory," she thought, as she turned the pages over, "but there is very little triumph in it. Lionel Carrington is dead, and if I cared for him at all, it is over now; but it was not the same feeling I had for that unfortunate Stephen, and I really can't tell what would have happened if—— Poor Lionel! Poor Stephen!"

Helen seemed in these words to be bidding an eternal farewell to the two men who had loved her, and to be relegating their memories to the tender mercies of forgetfulness, for as her eye fell on a certain headline she smiled. The words told her that Blatchford's axe had already been at work; and the first to be thrust out of the line of stalwarts was a certain Major Scrimmins, reputed editor of "City Living."

Helen smiled more confidently as she threw the papers aside, for she knew that Blatchford would accept none but the best quality of gold. He would try it seven times in the fire, and if he found it spurious it would be discarded.

"Will he find enough good men to support him?" she asked herself as she reached for her portfolio and pulled out Maud's unfinished letter, to add the fact that she was going to accept the legacy, and that they were to return soon.

She wrote to Blatchford, addressing the letter to his club. In it she said she was returning to New York, explaining that both she and her mother were tired of travelling, and longed for home. Helen sealed her letters, rang to have them posted, and then surprised herself by sighing wearily as she sank back among her pillows and closed her eyes in sheer vexation of spirit.

XXXI

HELEN never looked better than on the evening of the reception. Becomingly gowned in a soft, clinging material, with a faint touch of color and no jewels, she made a pleasing foil to her mother, who was regal in black velvet and diamonds. The girl seemed rather more like a spirit than a creature of flesh and blood.

To increase the effect, Helen was *distraite,* and it was like one in a dream that she entered the apartments in the Palazzo Venezia, where the Ortenlohes were established for the season, in the wake of her mother and followed by D'Astraluce, who had first sent his carriage to bring them from the Grand Hôtel and now escorted them into the room where his sister was receiving.

After curtseying to her hostess, she took D'Astraluce's arm and walked through the rooms with him. Once in a while he paused and presented men to her, or introduced her to an old and very much bejewelled dowager. On the other side of the supper-room he stopped on the threshold of a smaller apartment. Acquiescing in his wish to sit down and converse, Helen found a seat on a sofa on the far side of the room, where she sank down, while the Duke seated himself beside her.

"You are beautiful as a goddess to-night," said D'Astraluce, "and it pleases me to see that you follow our foreign custom and wear no jewels. In that shimmering white frock you look like some angel from the unseen world, a being too high above ordinary mortals for them to hope to be able to hold you down to earth. To me you seem almost as if you were too ethereal to exist on

this sordid sphere; yet I am vain enough to try and see if I cannot find means to bring this miracle to pass."

"Ah, duke," remarked Helen smiling, "what pretty compliments you pay! Our men are not so gallant and full of flowery speeches. I think it is such an attractive custom, and very flattering, because a woman likes to be admired."

"You think we are not sincere, but indeed we are," insisted D'Astraluce earnestly. "Only you see, we are all poets at heart, and our artistic sense, which is strong, makes us notice and speak of the things that please us. We are much like children in that way."

"I suppose," admitted Helen musingly, "that our men are more—practical, often too much taken up with thinking about themselves, too self-conscious perhaps, to notice details; and then, of course, it is not the custom with us to make—remarks which are so—personal."

"With us," said he, "we are more free, less bound down by the conventions. We see, we feel, we speak. It is but a just appreciation of the result a beautiful woman has obtained of making the best of herself. A woman on this side is always well-appointed. Nothing is wrong, and the finished effect is of a woman who, if not always beautiful, is at her best, absolutely her best, in appearance. For instance, you have dressed your hair low to-night; that is right, that is artistic, for it suits to a remarkable degree your type, which is the Græco-Roman."

"Just think of your noticing that!" exclaimed Helen, laughing. "It was a sudden idea of mine, and tried on the spur of the moment."

"It was then a moment of true genius," said he seriously, "and I thank you for the beauty it has added. Always beautiful, you are to-night of a surpassing beauty which is the softness of the dream-woman."

"Ah, how pretty that is!" cried Helen. "Of course I suppose the habit of thought your people are accustomed to is largely a result of environment. In some ways you are contradictory though, for while you love the beautiful you often pause before the climax, which is dramatic as well as artistic. You are joyous, but, too, you are curiously reserved. How do you explain that?"

"How subtle you are, signorina!" said the Duke. "But you speak truly. You have a keen judgment. Yes, we do appear on the surface often, because we fear to probe too deeply, lest we come to a strata of ugliness. Life to us is beautiful, and any departure from the artistic standards we are born to naturally, hurts and wounds us. We loathe sordid distinctions; we avoid the uncouth; we are frightened by the undeveloped, the crude; and we take our pleasure in contemplating the finished, the perfect, the ideal. Love is never finished, never perfect. It emanates from the heart, and through countless æons floats indefinitely towards the unsullied brightness of desire, refined many times in the eternal fire which burns before Love's altar in the Temple of its goddess, everlasting, unquenchable, unfailing, but always unsatisfied."

"You speak as if there were elements of pain and of sorrow mixed with love," said Helen wonderingly. "I suppose it may be true, but why?"

"Because we can never be satisfied," answered D'Astraluce, as if he were repeating an axiom. "We love and go on loving, the object, the woman of the moment, carrying us on to the next phase; and then another of your charming sex lures us away in our pursuit of the ideal for a space, until we are forced on, often alone. The two souls which have met by chance have or have not the affinity, the oneness of strength, sufficient to stay each other in their endless flight. Our bodies die and pass

away; but our soul, quick with love, never dies. Often for the lifetime of two bodies, these souls in their orbits meet and mingle, but by the law of love parting comes at last, and God's decree is immutably fulfilled."

"Ah," mused Helen dreamily, "I cannot conceive of love so ephemeral. If I loved once, I should love always. If my love grew cold, I would never acknowledge it. I think my pride would save me from such a confession of weakness."

"It is a curious and different viewpoint," remarked he; "but I cannot agree with you. I think as I do because it is my nature to do so. You who are not of the Latin races cannot understand us, for you dissect, you calculate, where we seek blindly for the ideal, and, once finding it, we rush to seize it before it is caught up and escapes into space."

"But what of the soul which is left behind——?" began Helen; then paused as if ashamed of her interest.

"The soul that is left behind," repeated the duke, as if it were a problem he was seeking the exact solution of. "The soul that is left behind——" he reiterated still vaguely. "Ah," with a smile of sudden sweetness, "it waits for the awakening of its strength, for the moment when it shall recognize its affinity, that psychological instant when the new-found soul is knitted with it into one great, living, breathing unity."

"How," asked Helen, "can one ever fall in love if, as is often the case, your women are shut up in convents and only emerge from their sterile walls to marry?"

"It is our way," shrugged D'Astraluce, "and it is a good system. Soon love is born in the answering heart, where it has slept for long, waiting for the touch of its prince and master to awaken it."

"It is not our way," objected Helen. "But I wonder

which is the wiser. I cannot see how any one can fall in love inevitably, as you say, with another they hardly know."

"Listen," he begged in a low voice; "perhaps you may be right. Our conventions are iron, but we cannot be tempted more than we can resist. We are only human, after all. Dear signorina, I yield. Let the light of your soul awake, so that mine may be cured of its infirmity, grasp yours, and be arrested in its stormy flight. My warring soul is weary of movement. Give it of your peace."

"What—what do you mean?" asked Helen faintly, looking at her companion as if she feared to understand.

"Ah, are you soul-asleep?" he inquired in his turn. "It means, heart of my heart, that I love you. I wish you to become my wife."

Helen did not move; she closed her eyes, as if the light in his burned and hurt her.

"No, no!" she cried, half turning away. "I cannot! I am confused. I *am* honored, for marriage with you would bring much with it. You are bribing me to sell myself. It is a—temptation, but"—laughing nervously, "I—do not love you. Other interests, other pursuits hold me. Oh, I am sorry, but I cannot be your wife."

Helen faced him. Her eyes looked into his, and as he dropped his own before her gaze, innocent and suffering, he caught for an instant the intoxicating sweetness of her presence and, groaning, held his hand over his closed eyes, in very bitterness of spirit.

Helen arose, without looking at him, took a few tentative steps towards the door, and paused irresolutely. Her hesitation was due to the fact that the situation did not seem finished. It was like a dream from which she had

not roused herself. She did not seem to have either lost or won the game.

She had refused a man of position, rich, good-looking, and a gentleman. She had had a moment when the brilliancy of his offer dazzled her; and she confessed that for an instant the thought of home, hospital work, society, and politics faded, overpowered by a desire which did not, however, cling firmly, until she thrust the picture from her as impossible to accept, with a sense of relief at her renunciation.

She had not won; she had lost, then? It was at this moment that she turned again to D'Astraluce. What was she losing, and what could she gain? She was losing the unselfish love of a man who gave all and asked nothing in return. What could she do? She strove to read the answer, as she looked hesitatingly at his dejected attitude. Clearly she could change nothing, save by giving herself; but she could not do that, and she sighed. Why not? It was such a simple, easy thing to utter, the one word which would change the whole face of the universe for him. Could she say it? No! Then, why? Because she realized that she cared too much for other things, which she would have to give up if she accepted him; the trust she had accepted in connection with the Carrington Home, the society of her own people, the opportunity of learning and understanding the struggle for political cleanliness which Mr. Blatchford was going to make; but—and here she returned abruptly to her first reason—she did not, could not, love him.

Was it, after all, necessary for her to marry? Everyone, including her mother, was anxious for her to do so. She knew that a match with D'Astraluce would give complete satisfaction, but she could not bring herself to face such a cold-blooded proposition as a loveless marriage.

That was certain. And until such a remote possibility as her falling in love, which did not at the present time seem even probable, presented itself, she found herself happier in not contemplating it. She had too many other interests in life to make it necessary for marriage to intervene, as yet.

"Poor D'Astraluce!" she thought as advancing slowly she seated herself again by the duke's side.

He looked up sadly at her, and as her eyes looked back into his, his glance changed to one of eagerness and a desire to possess.

"You must marry me!" he whispered hoarsely. "I love you. I love you. I love you."

Gently Helen withdrew the hand he had seized, and which, oblivious to all else, he was covering with hungry, passionate kisses.

"Listen, D'Astraluce," she said in low but compelling tones. "You have done me great honor, and I regret that I cannot prove myself sensible of it. If I can still be your friend, I crave the protection of friendship and request that you will not overstep its bounds; but listen to me while I try to tell you why I cannot be your wife. Some time ago I almost loved a man, and he asked me to marry him. What need is there to tell you more, save that he is dead? Whether he continued to love me to the end, I do not know; but it makes no difference. He left to me a sacred trust, and until it is fulfilled I can think of nothing which can interfere with its faithful performance. If I had loved you, it might have been different. If I had had the slightest spark of love for you, if my heart had beaten a jot faster for you, I might have been tempted beyond my strength. Even if I were merely flattered by your attentions, and hoped you would cause love to spring up in my heart, I could not do so. I regret

to say that this must be good-bye. I am going home to-morrow. I am more than sorry, but you *do* understand why I cannot be your wife?"

As Helen with these words cast love from her, so that no obstacle should bar the narrow path of duty, she rose; and D'Astraluce, rising too, took her hand with a courtly gesture and raised it to his lips reverently.

"I understand," he repeated dully, and offering her his arm walked once more through the rooms, this time in silence, leaving her at the last with his sister, knowing full well that he was destined never to see her again. Yet he did not ask the reason for her sudden departure from Rome. The rich, low tones of her voice were to haunt him for many a long day; but he bore himself bravely, as a gentleman should. It meant, too, so much to him, this love; it was the one great love of his life. Later on, when he married, it was for reasons of state, as he said he must have a duchess who should bear him a son. And so he lived, having loved, resolutely burying his love, and looked out boldly on the world, smiling as before his cold, well-bred smile. One day his great heart stopped beating, because he was so tired; but he had lived to see his son grow up. His wife wept a few quiet tears, for she knew that although he had never loved her, yet she was glad that the proud spirit was at last at peace before the Throne of Grace.

It was not until the day they left Rome and were actually in the compartment of the train alone, on the way to Genoa, that Helen had the courage to confess to her mother that she had actually refused the very man Mrs. Mainwaring had hoped she would marry, having had her interest awakened and her eyes opened to the advantages of such an alliance by none other than Lady Santley herself.

"Are you angry?" asked Helen timidly, not daring to read her mother's face, but looking appealingly at the delicate well-gloved hands, lying clasped tightly in Mrs. Mainwaring's lap. It was the only sign of emotion the older woman displayed.

"Angry?" her mother asked, raising her eyebrows in faint surprise. "My dear, a lady is never angry."

Helen strove to detect even a trace of bitterness in her mother's tone, but she could not.

"But I am sure you must be hurt or—disappointed," ventured Helen.

"I don't think I said so," interposed her mother, with a touch of rancor, which she concealed by letting her voice quickly assume a neutral tone, as she looked with apparent indifference straight out of the window at the moving landscape.

"Mother, what else could I have done?" begged Helen.

"What indeed?" echoed Mrs. Mainwaring; and Helen drew back suddenly, her lips trembling, struck by the coldness of the other's tone.

Seeing with the corner of her eye the girl's emotion, Mrs. Mainwaring unbent and taking her hand pressed it gently.

"I am only sorry, Helen. It would have been so eminently satisfactory." Yet the sigh which accompanied these words was hardly audible.

"I know exactly how you feel," said Helen, adopting a bantering tone as her courage returned. "You are really furious with me, you hate me, because I refused a duke."

"No, my dear," retorted the mother quietly; "I am not, as you express it, furious, nor do I hate you; neither am I greatly disappointed, though such a very desirable marriage would have pleased me, I confess that frankly."

"Dear mother. I am so sorry," she exclaimed in mock

penitence, though her eyes were twinkling; and then, realizing from her mother's expression that she had gone too far, she leaned forward, caught up her mother's hand, held it to her cheek, and said impulsively, with tears in her voice: "I wish I had married him, for your sake."

"That would have been quite an unnecessary sacrifice, considering that, as you yourself confessed, you did not love the man."

Helen knew there were both bitterness and irony in her mother's words, but as the train slowed up at this moment she turned and looked out of the window.

They were approaching Genoa. The last stage of their journey was beginning, for they were expecting to sail to-morrow.

And the first notes of a new song sounded in Helen's wondering heart, a song of content, because—they were going home. The girl's eyes shone as the music swelled to chords of sweetest harmony, and she knew the gladness that a bird suddenly set at liberty must feel which is singing its loudest, though the heart seems as if it would burst from sheer excess of emotion. Home, home!

XXXII

WHEN the Mainwarings returned to New York they found their native city seething in the turmoil of a bitter political struggle. Helen at once found her interest in politics reawakened by the nearness of the political horizon. For the first few days she saw comparatively little of Blatchford, who had but recently disclosed himself, as his energies were chiefly devoted to his political work. Gradually, however, he fell into the way of dropping in for tea at the Mainwarings to discuss the various phases of the situation with Helen, encouraging her to advise him or to offer suggestions.

One afternoon Seward decided to discuss his conduct of the campaign with Miss Mainwaring at greater length. He reviewed the situation critically, going more into detail than formerly. He explained to her that the crux of the situation from the very beginning had depended on his ability to sift the chaff from the wheat. He made it clear to her why he had abstained from taking an active part until lately, saying that his object had been to find out the true merits of his supporters. As a result of this policy it happened that various heads, hitherto believed to have been secure, fell; and among the derelicts was Major Scrimmins. The reason for such a decision was that the man had been found to be an unprincipled rascal, working entirely for his own ends, and therefore useless to the success of the new movement. Helen asked who the district attorney was to be, and Blatchford replied that a certain Mr. Sayres had been brought forward, who would, if elected, probably employ

as his assistant Willard Deane. Miss Mainwaring contended that the same objections might be made to Deane as had been present in the case of Scrimmins, but Blatchford replied that Deane, though alive to his own interests, was not so shrewd as Scrimmins, and that in his and Sayres' opinion he could be controlled so as to be useful to them.

"You see," he continued, "that Deane has more information about the 'black hand' conspiracy than any other man, and Sayres and I have decided that if we gave him full power to act he could accomplish more than any one else. We shall tell him to make what he can out of it, for we both feel that the only way to control him is to give him a free hand. This can only be done by making it possible for him to make a personal profit."

"Is n't that a sign of weakness on your part, Mr. Blatchford?" asked Helen gravely. "Are n't you adopting the methods of your opponents?"

"No, I think not," answered Seward shrugging his shoulders slightly; "for you see we have to fight a man of that kind with his own weapons if we expect to reduce him to submission. His submission is necessary to us, because he possesses knowledge which we must have."

"I am sorry it has to be," replied Helen, "but in this instance I feel that you know best. But," she continued, "what about the press, has it changed its attitude?"

"Yes," said Seward emphatically, "it has. At first you know it was wavering and uncertain, but now it has begun to assume a more decided tone in my favor."

"What has brought this about?" queried Helen.

"The fact that certain strong articles have appeared in Blaney's Magazine lately has had its effect on the public," remarked Seward. "And these articles have

been so frank and persistent of late that the press has commented on them favorably."

"I am glad to hear that," answered Helen; "but tell me what they said, as I am sorry to say I have not read them."

"These well directed attacks have been chiefly aimed at the New York National, whose editor is a protégé of my opponent Hirshler. Hirshler, as you know, is protected by an unscrupulous organization, and it is by its influence that this particular editor is in turn protected by Hirshler, in order to show his gratitude for the aid given by the National in the management of the campaign."

"How is that? I don't understand."

"Well, you see," responded Seward, "the newspapers have been giving me much more prominence lately. They have reported my trips up the State favorably, and have commented upon the reforms I advised in a most flattering way. The only paper which has failed to make mention of me is the New York National, and for this omission I must thank Hirshler. The only retaliation which the New York National has made is to laud Hirshler to the skies; and lately they have gone further and weakened their position by frankly admitting the original deal entered into by Boss Irish and Hirshler, at the time of the latter's nomination in the National Convention. It stated that the deal was now completed, and would insure their candidate's success."

"How can they say such a foolish thing?" asked Helen angrily. "Can't they see that it will hurt them in the end?"

"Apparently not," answered Seward smiling. "They go further than that, however; they ignore the attacks upon Hirshler which the other papers have taken up,

prompted by the attitude of Blaney's. I can't see the wisdom of disregarding such attacks though, and I think they will have to pay some attention to them soon. The questionable policy of singing exclusively their candidate's praises is also an unwise one, as I think they will sooner or later perceive."

"I agree with you absolutely and entirely," replied Helen, as she shook hands with Blatchford prior to his departure.

It was during the days of the closing scenes of the great political battle that excitement rose to fever heat. Mass meetings were held, night made hideous by torchlight processions and execrable music. The actors at the various theatres, striking the popular note, added verses to their topical songs derogatory to the candidate who was to be snowed under, and lauding his successful rival to the stars—a fact discounted in advance.

Blatchford became more and more the popular idol, but on odd afternoons he continued to drop in about tea-time and discuss the progress of the situation with Helen. The day before the election he happened to find Helen at home, and as he listened to what she said, he noticed that she seemed for the first time to assume that his interest in what she was saying was real and genuine.

"You see," she said, "why I feel so warmly about the Carrington Home, and why I wish to carry out Mr. Carrington's wishes."

"But the man himself was so essentially a man of no ideals," objected Blatchford.

"I admit that," said Helen, looking down thoughtfully as she stood by the mantel-piece. "But," she continued, "it is so hard to assign any definite ideals to a man of his calibre. A man like yourself, for instance, is

more large-minded, more liberal, more—oh, I don't suppose I stopped to differentiate."

"No, of course not," rejoined Seward gently, having heard something of the intimacy between Lionel and Helen.

"I just drifted on without realizing where I was going," continued Helen dreamily. "I confess I could not help feeling sorry for him, though I am afraid he did not deserve my sympathy. In his official capacity I admired and respected him, but—I did n't stop to differentiate," she repeated, as if she were trying to convince him that she was speaking the truth.

"Yes, I can see how that might easily happen," he remarked slowly; "and I think it all the more praiseworthy of you to look on the money he left you as a trust fund. It *is* a sacred trust, if you feel that way."

"I don't believe," murmured Helen, "I have ever really cared for any man—— It is so hard to decide if one really is in love."

"Not if one loves truly, for then one knows it. There is no doubt, only a great peace in the soul, and from it emanates the greatest happiness in the world."

"Are *you* then in love?" asked Helen suddenly, unconscious that she was speaking aloud.

"Yes," replied he, "I am in love, very much in love;" and he smiled meaningly, but Helen, looking fixedly down into the glowing embers again, did not see the look of eagerness on the face bending towards her, and drew in her breath sharply at his words.

Seward was silent, although he could not understand her present mood.

Not realizing that a crisis had been reached, Helen continued to look away, and so did not see the lines of anxiety which deepened on Blatchford's face. It was

almost as if he had been sorely wounded, but his innate courage came to the rescue, and the strained look relaxed, giving place to a softer expression, which seemed to express resignation and a tacit acceptance of circumstances over which at present he had no control. He made an attempt to be philosophical; but who can be calm when the heart, whose every beat is pain, stifles and suffocates one, sending the blood to the brain, increasing the mad desire to possess, to strain her to him, to rain kisses on her cold face, and feel at last the lips against his which he would warm to love? As he looked at her, there was no response, and his yearning was silenced. Yet it was the last day he could come freely. Everything pointed to political success, but it would be success with a sting now, for somehow this love, born in the twinkling of an eye, had come to be so closely linked with that other success he had dreamed of, and the realization of which seemed already dawning, that he could not imagine one without the other; but if it had to be otherwise,—Kismet. The temptation to be like the others in politics rose and sickened him. No, whatever happened, he would be true to his trust. He thrust aside the ignoble thought, tossed the load lightly from his shoulders, feeling at once relieved and less cramped. And yet it was the last day. It might have been so different. Well, he must go soon, and he determined to make the remainder of his time as bearable as possible. The subject of the hospital bored him, although he was unselfish enough to have accepted anything she desired—if only she loved him. He turned to her. Politics was the one common ground they could meet on; and for the brief time left he would cling to that in desperation, for love was beyond his reach, and his soul henceforth must feed on ambition alone, at best an unsatisfactory diet. His way was destined to be

solitary, leading to nowhere, save to a pinnacle upon whose height he would be conscious of no sensation, except the pressure of a crown of laurel, which would be but a crown of thorns to him; so much for honors without love.

"Miss Mainwaring," he said at last, looking up quickly, "let us sit down. I wish to tell you what has been done to bring the campaign to a close."

Helen complied, and as she listened kept her eyes on him.

"Now, what do you think?" he asked.

"The secret canvass in the newspapers was an excellent plan to gauge the labor vote," she replied, "for so much depends on their support. Figures do not lie, and the result is very favorable to you. There is a break in the ranks of labor, and the sentiment is veering towards the Independent ticket."

"*Everything* depends on the labor vote," corrected Blatchford, "and unless some dirty work is attempted at the last moment, we ought to make a good showing; at least, as compared with last year, when Hirshler nearly made the mayor's office."

"Mr. Blatchford," said Helen earnestly, "if the power of that man Irish is waning, you will win, for you are strong, and have the ability to carry the affair through to a successful conclusion. I fancy you carry most things through that you make up your mind to. You have magnetism, you have courage and a strong will, you are a leader of men; and those are the elements necessary to success."

She held out her hand impulsively, and her expression was very winsome and sweet.

Blatchford, a glad light in his eye, suddenly knelt at

her feet, and taking her outstretched hand raised it to his lips reverently kissing it.

"Helen—dear," pleaded he softly, "I love you. I want you for my wife. Dear, I have loved you since Italy. You are essential to my happiness. I love you, darling. I feel as if I had always loved you. Will you not speak to me? Your soul will awake, its pulses quicken, and so love must come to you."

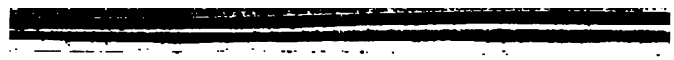
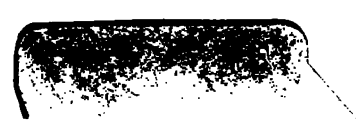
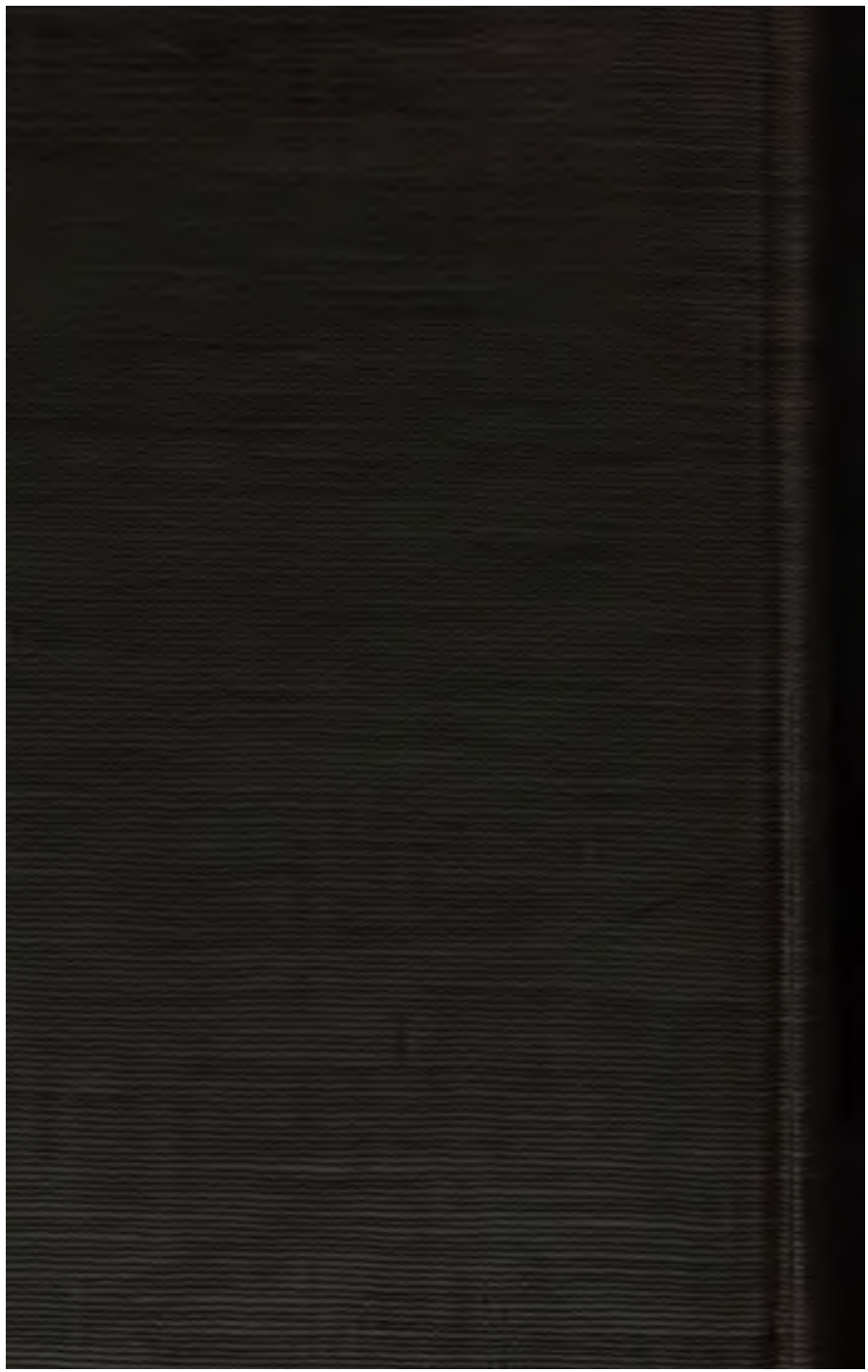
"You are masterful," she breathed dreamily, her hand dropping gently from his.

"Helen," he begged, "awake! Come to me. Ah, comé." She looked at him timidly, but the fire in his eyes confused her, and she half covered her eyes with her hand. "After to-day I cannot come; it is good-bye unless you bid me stay," persisted Seward, perplexed by her silence.

Helen looked at him appealingly, and as she did so the song in her heart wavered and trembled, as a dragon-fly bearing the jewel of Gyges flew near. She closed her eyes momentarily, and so did not see the magic insect settle at last on her heart; but the heart itself responded, and with the eyes of her soul she saw clearly at last.

"Ah, Seward, do not leave me! I do love you. I know now that I have loved you from the first."

At her words Seward drew her to him, and she, with a sigh of happiness, clung to him in utter abandonment of joy.

As their lips met, Helen felt all thoughts of the Carrington Home, of the world, and of politics, fade before the splendor of this great love which had come to her, even at the eleventh hour; and the dragon-fly sailed heedlessly away in widening circles, leaving in the woman's heart its mysterious presence, which is the very essence of love.

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